

University of San Diego

Digital USD

Dissertations

Theses and Dissertations

2003-01-14

Looking Forward, Looking Back, Looking Inward: Lessons from Vital Women Leaders in Old Age

Shelly Marks Valdez EdD
University of San Diego

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#)

Digital USD Citation

Marks Valdez, Shelly EdD, "Looking Forward, Looking Back, Looking Inward: Lessons from Vital Women Leaders in Old Age" (2003). *Dissertations*. 724.
<https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations/724>

This Dissertation: Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.

**LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK, LOOKING INWARD:
LESSONS FROM VITAL WOMEN LEADERS IN OLD AGE**

by

Shelly Marks Valdez

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education
University of San Diego

January 14, 2003

Dissertation Committee

Johanna S. Hunsaker, Ph.D.
Dan Miller, Ph.D.
Antoinette Cepe Thomas, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

Current social paradigms, based on established theory about the aged, consider old age as a time of drastic decline and deterioration and view the aged as nonproductive takers of society's resources. Far from using the wisdom and resources of the aged population, our society marginalizes old adults and treats them as obsolete. This study looks into the lives of nine women over the age of 65 who have found within themselves the strength, courage and determination to overcome the stereotypes of aging in order to become leaders in their old age. Life stories were obtained through personal interviews. Data from the interviews is presented in both narrative analysis, presented as individual chronological narratives, and analysis of narrative, a cross-case analysis, from which the following themes were derived: (1) the importance of education and life-long learning, values that served as foundations for much of their life experiences, opening avenues and opportunities to achieve, develop and display leadership; (2) a history of personal and professional achievement based on the skills, talents and characteristics that served as a template for their leadership in old age; (3) strong support systems to back them in their endeavors and from which to draw emotional strength (4) a lifetime history of giving support to others, a characteristic that often opened the door for them to their present leadership pursuits; (5) strong positive attitudes, willingness to try new ventures and a persistence to overcome obstacles; (6) definite opinions about the importance of remaining productive and active in old age.

© 2003

by

Shelly Marks Valdez

All rights reserved

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters, Lorien, Lyndsey and Hallie, who have been and always will be my best teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To Jo Hunsaker, I give my heartfelt thanks for your steady guidance throughout the process of writing this dissertation. Your humor kept me from taking myself too seriously. Your support calmed me when I panicked and your candidness allowed me to trust both the criticisms and the praise. Your genuine caring for me and for my work are felt and most heartily appreciated.

To Dan Miller, my thanks for taking me under your wing early on in my doctoral studies. Yours was the first class I attended as a doctoral student; you piqued my interest and challenged my thinking. I have felt your support through all the trials of the past four years.

To Antoinette Cepe Thomas, I give my undying thanks for your support and friendship for the last 15 years. You believed in my ability to do this before I did. You have challenged me when it was necessary and have been my cheerleader when I needed one.

To Mary Scherr who guided me in my first attempts at qualitative research and who sparked my love of coding transcripts and writing narratives. And for letting me cry on your shoulders when I needed to.

To Bob Donmoyer, thank you for your insights (and even for your editing when I hated seeing all those red marks!) during the development and presentation of the preliminary study and the proposal. Your gift for writing narrative is something I strive toward.

To Fred Galloway, thank you for your guidance in preparing me and my work for the dissertation proposal defense. You helped me focus the research and solidify my presentation.

To Helen Eckmann and Alana Nicastro, thank you for your loving support and friendship throughout the last four years. We are like the legs of a three-legged stool: the other two count on the third for stability. You have been a source of strength in more ways than you know.

To Katharine Calvin and Patti Chavez-Fallon, thank you for your insights and editing of the transcripts and stories and for your love and support in my non-school life.

To the incredible women who participated in this study, I thank you for so unselfishly sharing your personal lives with me and for revealing your strength and courage through your stories.

And to my husband, Raul Valdez, thank you for loving me enough to smile during this process, for telling me it was okay that we spent our time together with my head hunched over the computer, and for your love and unquestionable belief in me. Your encouragement kept me going, your shoulders were broad enough to handle all my tears and insecurities and your smile bright enough to guide me in the tunnel even before the light at the end was visible. RRILY.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT	iv
DEDICATION	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xii
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background.....	1
Statement of the Problem	5
Purpose of the Study	13
Significance of the Study.....	13
Research Questions	14
Explanation of Terms.....	15
Limitations of the Study.....	17
The Researcher's Assumptions	17
Organization of the Study.....	19
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	21
Introduction	21
History of Cultural Context of Aging in American Society	23
Women in the History of Aging.....	28
Theories of Aging.....	31
Retirement	42

CHAPTER	PAGE
Volunteerism in Retirement	45
Self-image in Old Age	46
Women's Paths to Leadership.....	49
Summary	50
III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	53
Participants	55
Selection Criteria	55
Selection Procedures	57
Sites	59
Research Procedure	59
Analysis of Data	64
Narrative analysis	64
Analysis of narrative.....	65
Human Subjects Concerns Related to Sample Selection	67
Limitations of the Study	69
IV. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS.....	73
Introduction to the Women's Stories.....	74
Louise	70
Felicia	89
Muriel	97
Anne	108
Mary Elizabeth	115
Donna Key Hotay	120
Sylvia	129

CHAPTER	PAGE
Ruby	141
Quan Yin	151
Summary	164
V. ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE	165
Theme 1. Education/Lifelong Learners	166
Theme 2. Achievement	169
Early Successes and Peak Experiences	169
Career	170
Theme 3. Support <i>from</i> Others	174
Theme 4. Support <i>to</i> Others: The Importance of Involvement and	
Participation	183
History of Volunteerism	185
Helping Others Meet Their Needs/Goals	186
Theme 5. Positive Attitudes	187
Optimistic Outlook on Life	187
“I Can Do This”	188
“If Not Me, Who Will Do This?”	188
Willingness to Try New Ventures	189
Overcomer of Obstacles	190
Theme 6. Opinions about Old Age	196
Thoughts About Retirement	196
Thoughts About Their Own Aging and Themselves in Old Age	198
Description of Self and How It Has Changed	201
Description of Self as Leader	203

CHAPTER	PAGE
Advice to Others	204
Summary	205
VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....	207
Reflections on the Process of Feminist Research	208
Becoming Leaders	215
Overcoming Obstacles	224
Generativity.....	228
Feelings About Old Age	229
Continued Use of the Term “Old Age”	234
Lessons and Recommendations	238
Final Reflections.....	243
REFERENCES	248
APPENDICES	
A. Informed Consent Form	268
B. Interview Guide	270

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1. Participants.....	76
2. Partial List of Participants' Activities in Their Old Age	77

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDICES	PAGE
A. Informed Consent Form.....	268
B. Interview Guide	270

Philosophy is perfectly right in saying that life must be understood backward. But then one forgets the other clause – that it must be lived forward. (Soren Kierkegaard)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Having had to obtain a new driver's license recently, I was pleasantly surprised when I saw my picture. At 50 years of age, I had been driving for over three decades and this was the first time in all those years that my driver's license picture didn't look like a mug shot, with one eye (or both) in some stage of blinking, winking or in some way shutting down, making me appear intoxicated. I rather liked this picture and showed it to a friend whose comment was, "What a great picture. You look like you're 16!"

Had I not been in the midst of researching and writing on the topic of old age, I would have taken her words as a compliment and not thought another thing of them. But, having just spent the last year and a half in the midst of facing my own and other's biases about age, her comment made me think twice. The fact is, telling someone he or she looks young is considered the highest of

compliments in our youth-oriented society. And by contrast, that makes the opposite a horrible insult.

The stereotypes about aging are insidious. We have lived with them for so long that we have taken them in and made them a part of us. Buying into these stereotypes is harmful to us as a society because it allows us to discount and negate the creativity and productivity of a large and growing portion of our population. But perhaps more importantly, it is harmful to us as individuals. Trying to deny age by resorting to plastic surgery or chemical peels or lavish “age-defying” products is not only expensive but is also paid for in loss of true self and authenticity. And believing that creaks and groans of our bodies are simply a normal part of aging can delay medical help until it may be too late.

As baby boomers approach old age, there are industries poised to serve them with products and services aimed at either denying age or treating the ailments thought to be associated with it. Social policies are based on the stereotypes we have held for decades, held in place by professions whose mission is to treat the deterioration and decline of our bodies and minds. These professions and industries would seem to have a vested interest in maintaining the stereotypes that bind us. They are aided by the media who play up the negative stereotypes and, for the most part, ignore those who defy them.

How do we change these paradigms of our society with respect to old age? There are multitudes who do not fit the image of old age as needy, senile, ill, non-productive takers of society’s goods and finances. But where are the stories of those who continue to be creative and productive givers to society?

Stories of those in old age who remain or become healthy productive givers to society can help remove our blinders about our own fears and prejudices about aging. Stories of old women, who face societal bias against both gender and age and yet who defy the stereotypes and prejudices against them, take us one more step. And hearing the voices of old women who have had the courage to become leaders for societal change in old age can allow us to see a path toward a broader and more inclusive society in which old age is another stage of productive life, not a doomed path to deterioration and decline.

The present study seeks to provide those stories and explanations about how they do or do not fit the norms, expectations and stereotypes associated with old age in our society. The study looks into the lives of old women who have found within themselves the strength, courage, determination or obstinacy to overcome the stereotypes of aging in order to become leaders in their old age. The life stories of nine women leaders over the age of 65 were obtained through personal interviews. Their stories can now be counted and can serve as both role models and hedges against our own prejudices about old age, giving us new standards by which to gauge our own productivity as we age.

This study is limited to women for three main reasons. First, there is a paucity of literature and research on women in old age and it is the intent of this study to add to that base of research. There is a need for models of adult development of women at all stages of life.

Second, the study begins with the a priori belief that the role of gender is an important factor in the specific arena in which this study is focused and to the

extent that this is so, the study takes a feminist perspective with respect to the orientation of the study itself. The women in the study faced the same life-molding world events as the men in their age cohort. For example, all were children of the Depression, all spent adolescence or early adulthood during World War II. But the women in the study faced obstacles, such as prejudices toward women, that the men did not face. The choices that were available to them in terms of jobs and careers were limited because of their gender. For that reason, the leadership opportunities open to them were restricted as well. In addition, the negative stereotypes about aging strike women to a greater extent than men. While old women are considered in our society to be sexless and unattractive, the image of the older, especially powerful, man is one that is thought to be immensely attractive and sought after. Witness the number of socially acceptable relationships as well as the many media productions featuring young women and men old enough to be their fathers or grandfathers. By studying a segment of the population whose options were fewer and about whom negative biases were greater and yet who we find as leaders in old age despite these possible handicaps, we are open to an even greater hope for a vital and productive old age for all of us.

Third, as noted above, to offset the negative assumptions, stereotypes, fears, and prejudices we, as a society, hold about old age, the study looks at what are considered the outliers of the norm. Productive women leaders over 65 would certainly fall outside of societal expectations.

Finally, this study purposefully omits women of celebrity for whom advantages and opportunities not open to society as a whole are made available. It is yet another purpose of the study to peer into ordinary lives and see what makes or allows some of these women to do what are considered extraordinary things. Having come into their leadership activities at an age considered beyond productivity and given no uncommon or exceptional advantages, their stories would seem to offer a perspective to allow us reconsider our paradigms.

Statement of the Problem

Current social paradigms, based on established theory about the aged, consider old age as a time of drastic decline and deterioration and view the aged as nonproductive takers of society's resources, at least in terms of medical care and social services (Friedan, 1993; Kerschner & Pegues, 1998). Far from using the wisdom and resources of the aged population, which Mark Freedman (2000) called "our nation's only growing natural resource," our society oftentimes marginalizes old adults and treats them as obsolete (Small, 2000). Because the aged lack opportunities for continued productivity, there is a "growing mismatch between older people's abilities and the roles they are expected to fill" (Uhlenberg, 1992, p.449).

This mismatch may occur, in part, because much of the research on which contemporary theories of aging were built was based on convenience samples of mostly male residents in nursing homes (Harris, 1990; Friedan, 1993). The fact that the subjects were institutionalized would suggest that these men were not representative of the general population either in terms of their health or

social/familial resources. In addition, both Erikson (1963) and Levinson (1978) based their theories of adult development, which suggest that in the later stages of life we become more internally and personally oriented rather than external/professionally oriented, solely on descriptions of the lives of men who came of age before the 1960's. Most of these men were not studied past the age of 60.

Even if these biases are discounted, there have been numerous medical and technological changes and advances in our society in the 40 years since those theories were developed that bring their validity into question. For example, 40 years ago old age was socially defined as beginning in one's early 60's (Uhlenberg, 1992). Retirement was not just expected but mandatory in the United States at age 65. The life expectancy of the average American was less than 70 years (Manheimer, 1995). There were few if any incentives for continued productivity in society and, in fact, there were obstacles aplenty.

Today, however, people are not only living longer but working longer. The average life expectancy of American adults has moved from age 46 to nearly 80 since 1900 (Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Aging, 2000). With greater longevity and better health in old age, the length of potential productivity has increased significantly.

In addition, the sheer numbers of people who reach old age is, as Marc Freedman (2000) noted, "...staggering. Half of all the people who have ever lived to age 65 are *currently* alive today" (p. 6). With the surge of births known as the

Baby Boom,¹ there will be larger and larger numbers of men and women in the years of our lives we refer to as “old age”.

Our current social paradigms have not kept up with the advances that now find us with large numbers of men and women past age 65 who have much to offer our society in productivity, creativity and wisdom. Erik Erikson (1997), who decades after his initial work in adult development extended his research by interviewing both men and women in old age, wrote, “Lacking a culturally viable ideal of old age, our civilization does not really harbor a concept of the whole of life” (p. 114). Joan Erikson (Erikson, 1997), in her extension of the work she and her husband did together added:

... our society does not truly know how to integrate elders into its primary patterns and conventions or into its vital functioning. Rather than be included, aged individuals are often ostracized, neglected, and overlooked; elders are seen no longer as bearers of wisdom but as embodiments of shame. ... the difficulties of the ninth stage² both contribute to and are exacerbated by society's disregard. (p.114)

There is a need for those in old age to find “new ways of work, and new ways of love, that are important not only for our personal survival but also for society” (Friedan, 1993, p597), to constantly readapt and improvise new careers, building on and using the skills and interests used in the past. Freed from rigid

¹ According to an Urban Institute report (2000), approximately 75,000,000 children were born in the US in the period between 1946 and 1964 known as the Baby Boom. It is predicted that by the year 2030, close to 25% of the U.S. population will be over age 60.

² Erikson presented a life span theory of development in which he postulated that humans progress through a series of eight stages, each with its own psychosocial issue or crisis that had

boundaries that define love and work in earlier developmental stages, older adults can find that “old age becomes a time when one can be one’s own authority and make a unique contribution” (Baker & Wheelwright, 1983).

However, cultural and systemic obstacles to productive old age remain. Significantly, there are few role models of men or women who have continued their professional development in their old age and whom we, as a society, continue to hold in respect in their old age. Exceptions include Supreme Court Justices in the United States, who are, for the most part, well-respected and looked to precisely for the longevity of their professional wisdom. Symphony conductors, artists, and writers are all afforded a measure of respect in old age not common to our usual measure of disdain for the elderly. However, those who are not members of professions such as these, but who wish to continue or find new ways to grow and contribute, generally do not have such models.

There are a few examples of women in old age who acquired status through celebrity in their youth (most notably, respected actresses such as Jessica Tandy and Helen Hays come to mind). But there are few, if any, resources and examples for those who do not claim celebrity status but who wish to begin or continue to pursue productive areas of endeavor past age 65.

Our societal expectations of old age have remained grounded in the same theories and ideas noted previously. The old are looked at as a drain on society’s resources or are ignored altogether. While the bulk of literature on aging speaks of deterioration and decline, there is virtually no mention of the aged in the

to be resolved. The ninth stage was added by Joan Erikson in her continuation of their work together. She characterized the issue of this final stage as the resolution of integrity and despair.

media, including television and movies, except to portray them as incompetent, unproductive, and frail. These portrayals foster our thinking of old age as a time of ever-increasing weakness and ineptitude. How we direct our time and energy depends on the perception we hold of our societal and cultural environment but attempts by the aged to counter societal expectations run headlong into their own self-concepts based on those very expectations.

There is a strong need for more information on vital and productive aging, especially for women who have been and continue to be marginalized, if not excluded, from the literature in this area. A look at the most recent literature on retirement, for example, indicates that men continue to be the object of study much more often than women³ (e.g., Price, 1998; Whitbourne, 2001). There is also a conspicuous dearth of attention paid to women in the historical research on old age (Stavenuiter & Bijsterveld, 2000).

Images of old women in the literature on aging are difficult to find. When studying the history of aging, there is little devoted to old women. There may be several obvious reasons for this omission. Women who are now over age 65 were born in a time in which many did not work so they were not often included in studies on retirement. Most medical studies have been performed with male participants or have involved statistics involving male patients. As has been pointed out, developmental studies have focused on men and these areas of research have, in the past, simply generalized their findings onto women. While some would argue that these reasons may be obvious, if not forgivable, what is

less understandable is why old women have been left out of women's studies (MacDonald & Rich, 1991).

While there may be some commonalities between men and women in terms of development in old age, as the population ages, demographics indicate that women age longer and with less acute medical and social problems than men (Browne, 1998; Freidan, 1993). Since the expected lifespan for women is longer than for men, women need specific models that take into account their longevity and the fact that for a portion of late life, they are highly likely to be without their life partners, a fact that will impact them in terms of both finances and social support. According to Freidan (1993), "many studies indicat[e] that women experiencing the most change and discontinuity were the most vital later in life", a finding that Freidan sensed may be due, in part, to the "continual beginnings and ends confronting women in their reproductive role [which may] have strengthened them for age" (p. 143). The many disruptions common to women's lives may make women uniquely qualified for the re-adaptations and improvisations necessary for successful old age (Treleaven, 1999). At the receiving end of both ageism and sexism, old women face a form of double jeopardy when it comes to discrimination and prejudice. Citing work by Dowd and Benston (1978) and Markides (1995), Palmore (1999) described the theory of double jeopardy in this context as being a multiplicative effect that occurs from the combination of inclusion in more than one minority group. The prejudices

³ While this may be due, in part, to the fact that there were fewer women in the workplace at the time before this population reached retirement age, it nonetheless leaves us without

against each group are intensified in combination with the prejudices and discriminations against the second group. Therefore, for example, “if women are perceived as generally weaker, then old women are perceived as being completely helpless” (Palmore, 1999, p. 83). He asked the question of “whether the inferior status of older women is due to present sexism against older women or to a lifetime of past sexism” (p. 12). Although there are mixed and conflicting results of studies of double jeopardy with respect to age and some social indicators, its effects do become evident in our society as a double standard between old men and old women in such areas as beauty, ability and sexuality. There are far fewer old women than older men considered handsome or beautiful, sexually attractive, or highly competent. Even definitions of what it means to be old differ when applied to men versus women. For many years menopause was considered the onset of old age for women. But because women generally enter menopause between the ages of 45 and 52, the passage marking old age for women was considerably younger than what was considered “old” for men.

For women to attempt new and productive endeavors in old age in the face of a society that bombards them with negative beliefs and practices on two fronts takes a measure of courage. To show leadership in those endeavors takes even more. Monroe⁴ has stated that the currency of leadership is courage. In their work on leadership, Heifetz (1994) and Heifetz & Laurie (1997, 1999) noted that leaders create conditions that instill confidence, allow people to find and

information about how women decide on and experience their retirement years.

⁴ Dr. Terri Monroe, University of San Diego, class lecture, 1999.

implement solutions that require changed perspectives, attitudes and habits.

They noted further that these conditions allow people and organizations to work through adaptive challenges, which are faced when:

- one must resolve complex problems that do not have ready answers,
- new perspectives unfold that challenge deeply held beliefs,
- one must re-evaluate the relevance and values that brought us to the present.

It would appear that women in old age who defy the stereotype of age as characterized by drastic decline and who re-invent ways to love and work fall into the paradigm of leadership as defined by Heifetz and Laurie. They themselves are working through the adaptive challenges of vital aging and are serving as models of courage for those who follow to do the same. In order to thrive in old age, they must look for answers to questions for which there are no easy answers, develop new perspectives by evaluating the relevance and values that brought them through their youth and middle adulthood. The risk inherent in this venture takes courage. There is potentially much to learn from vibrant and vital older women about resilience, connectedness, control over one's life, bringing the whole person to one's work, flexibility and adaptability. Women with the courage to become leaders in old age, without societal role models or examples, could be considered pioneers who forge new ground without trails and maps for success. Their stories can serve as role models by giving hope, courage and inspiration to those who follow.

Purpose of the Study

The present study examined stories of women past the age of 65 who do not fit the American cultural stereotype of old age. The objective of the study was to give voice to the experiences of these women by: 1) obtaining their life story narratives that document the experiences, decisions and insights that led to leadership in new endeavors; 2) examining the themes that emerge from these life stories; and 3) integrating the narratives and themes in a way that will further our understanding of the potential contributions of older women in our society.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study add to our knowledge of the experiences of women in old age, especially those who do not fit the current cultural stereotypes. The stories of these outliers can, among other things, serve as alternative models of how old age can be approached. Such studies challenge both conventional thinking about old age as well as the limited perspectives formalized in most scholarly theories. Demonstrating that old age can be an exciting and vital period of life should be most useful to the burgeoning segment of our population approaching this stage of their lives.

The information from this study may also benefit counseling and social service professionals who work with aged women by adding to our knowledge about female adult development in the aging population, intrinsic motivation and possible roles for aged women in our society. The study provides insights and implications for social programs for the elderly and may help insure that such programs meet the needs of the older women they serve and contribute to

allowing these women to become or remain productive contributors to our society. In addition, participation in the study empowered participants to reflect on and express their life experiences in a positive framework that might prove inspiring to others.

Research Questions

The proposed study was initially guided by four research questions. Answers to these questions provide insight into the experiences of women in old age as a foundation towards a better understanding of the potential roles for women as productive contributors to society.

1. How have women begun their involvement in new leadership endeavors in their old age?
2. What life experiences prepared them to take up these pursuits?
3. What are the similarities among the women in both motivating factors and the means by which they carried out their choices?
4. What obstacles did they face and what assistance did they receive in pursuing these choices?

As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that the participants held views of old age and their place in it that widely differed from the stereotypes surrounding them. So a further research question became:

5. How do women leaders in old age relate on a personal and emotional level to the term “old age”?

Explanation of Terms

Old age. The term “old age” will be used to refer to people over the age of 65. While it is a term common in the gerontological research as well as popular literature, there are some, particularly those who see age mainly in terms of decline and deterioration, who view the use of the term as pejorative. However, it is one purpose of this study to dispel the stereotypes and assumptions about what constitutes “old” and to give examples of women for whom “old” refers to a number associated with vitality and not an inevitable description of or prescription for decreased faculties.

Age cohort. Manheimer (1995) defines cohort as a “group with common characteristics”. Birth or age cohorts are those “born within a specified time period” (p. 31), such as Baby Boomers. Cohorts are shaped by the events and education, family and economic opportunities, and especially the sociopolitical environment of its time (Conrad, 1992). Cohort effect refers to “socialization experiences that are largely shared with other members of the same cohort who grew up during the same period” (Harris, D. K., 1990, p. 474). For example, the women in the study belonged to an age cohort who were all children of the Depression.

Obstacle. “One that opposes, stands in the way of, or holds up progress” (*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language: Fourth Edition.* 2000.)

Outlier. A statistical term referring to measures that fall several standard deviations outside of the norm.

Leader. There are scores of definitions of the term leader in both popular and scholarly literature. Some refer to the traits that characterize one as a leader, others to the position of authority one holds in a group or organization, still others refer to leaders as anyone regardless of position, title or trait who influences others toward mutual goals. There are books on the servant leader (e.g., Greenleaf, 1991), the transactional and the transformational leader (e.g., Burns, 1979) and more. Heifetz (1994) wrote of a leader as one who mobilizes others to confront difficult problems and make adaptive changes. He further defined the conditions that leaders create to allow these changes to take place.

The women in this study fall under the definitions of leaders in several ways. First, as noted, they are leaders by virtue of their adaptive work in their own aging. Second, several of the women have been leaders in terms of their positions in groups or organizations. Third, each woman in the study also qualifies as a leader in that she was involved in some activity or organization in which she mobilized others to some sort of change, including change in attitude, policy, or belief. These women were all collaborative-builders for positive change. For example, Ann built coalitions for change within her professional organization to begin a scholarship foundation. Ruby built coalitions to get laws and policies passed for her community. She built coalitions in organizations in which she worked by engaging people in the work of the organization whom others did not believe were engage-able. Mary Elizabeth built collaborations to gain the financial and material resources to found an orphanage.

Limitations of the Study

This was a small study by virtue of the number of participants, their diversity in terms of ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic, or religious factors. In addition, the study was limited to women. Outliers to present theory and social expectations were the intentional subjects of study. Therefore, there was no attempt to generalize the findings to other women or men in old age.

The Researcher's Assumptions

While a *tabula rasa* on the part of the researcher would be ideal, no one enters a research study without some preconceived ideas. We are all products of our own life experiences, and as hard as we might try to be open-minded, we cannot be vacant-minded. We do not start from scratch. My own assumptions prior to this study included the very first and prime assumption that the life stories of women leaders in old age would be worthy of research. It was my belief that women leaders in old age would have something of value to tell us, something from which we could learn and draw conclusions about women, old age, leaders, and ourselves with respect to each of those categories. It was also my belief that there would be plenty of women leaders in old age from which to draw participants for just such a study.

There were plenty of detractors, at least before the study began, who believed that I was wrong on both accounts. I have a vivid memory of conversations detractors who did not believe that I would find enough older women leaders in the entire country to put together a study of this kind, let alone in one city, which is what I needed logistically to do this research.

As it turned out, interviewing women leaders in old age could be a life work, even if I limited the participant pool to those in my city alone. But the fact that there was even a question of this in the mind of intelligent and well-read adults let me know the horrible extent to which the leadership skills, talents, and accomplishments of old women are unseen and/or discounted in our society.

As a researcher I am aware that I also brought with me certain assumptions based on my own experiences with older women, including some very strong positive memories of my own grandmother who stood out in my childhood as a beacon of strength and compassion and an unending work ethic. In addition, as do all researchers, I brought into this work my own educational, cultural, and ideological biases. Knowing that these biases existed, I nevertheless attempted to keep the focus on the women, keeping in mind that my own background formed the framework that I brought to the analysis of the data from the women in the study, but trying to keep that framework in the background. Kvale (1996) wrote of this as a form of “bracketing” that “does not involve an absolute absence of presuppositions, but rather a critical analysis of one’s own presuppositions” (p. 54).

A final bias that I brought to this study was my own belief that I carried with me no negative biases about old age in general and old women in particular. In fact, however, this was not the case and the findings regarding my own biases in this area will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Organization of the Study

This chapter gave the background to the study. It discussed the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study and the importance of studying women leaders in old age. The research questions were listed and the terms used in the study were defined. In addition, assumptions made by the researcher with respect to the topic, the participants and the methodology were discussed.

Chapter Two reviews literature relevant to the study. This review of literature includes the historical context of aging in American society, a look at how women were represented in the study of the history of aging, the major theories of aging, (including biological, psychological theory, and social theories) and self-image in old age. The literature on women in retirement (including volunteerism in retirement) and women's paths to leadership is discussed.

Chapter Three summarizes the findings of a preliminary study that preceded the present narrative qualitative study and delineates the methodological procedures that evolved from the preliminary through the present study. Narrative analysis and analysis of narrative are discussed as a method of analyzing the data obtained from the participant interviews. The human subjects concerns are delineated according to the University of San Diego Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. Limitations of the present study are discussed.

Chapter Four presents the narrative analysis referred to in the methodological procedures of Chapter Three. The information obtained from the interviews is presented in narrative form to give the reader an individual

introduction to each of the women in the study. Pseudonyms are used to preserve confidentiality but quotes from the interviews are included to add each woman's voice to the historical life perspective offered in her story.

Chapter Five continues with the analysis of data by offering an analysis of narrative. This analysis constitutes a cross-case exploration of the data from all nine of the interviews. The six themes that emerged from the analysis of narrative are presented and discussed.

Chapter Six summarizes the project and the lessons learned about becoming leaders in old age and about human development in old age. In addition, the chapter discusses what can be gleaned from the women's stories about overcoming obstacles, the importance of role models and social support systems. Finally, the chapter presents recommendations that arose from the findings of the study and articulates ideas for future study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Although the field of gerontology only came into existence in the 1940's,⁵ the literature on aging is vast. In fact, one search on a single University of San Diego library database for literature on "aging" yielded over 608,000 journal articles and books. Clearly a comprehensive review of such an extensive literature base is outside the realm of this study. Additionally, a sample of titles of several hundred of these books and articles indicated that a large percentage are not applicable in that they refer to medical/pharmaceutical research and/or financial planning for the elderly. There are, however, bodies of literature within the field that are relevant and that help bring the present study into focus.

This literature review follows a multi-fold approach. First, I begin with the premise that aging is societally defined (Harris, 1990; Manheimer, 1995; O'Reilly, 1997). Therefore, the literature review begins with a history of the social cultural context of aging in the United States. This part of the review includes a view of

⁵ The scientific study of aging is known as gerontology. Although gerontology marks its beginnings in the 1940's, it was not well-established as a field of study until the 1970's (Van Zandt, 1991).

the most prevalent stereotypes of aging (i.e. that old age is a time of deterioration/decline) and clues about how we arrived at these views of old age.

The second part of the literature review looks at the theories of aging, including theories that attempt to explain how we spend our time in old age. There are many theories of aging, all of which can be broadly categorized into biological theories (e.g., Cristofalo, Tresini, Francis & Volker, 1999; Finch & Seeman, 1999), psychological theories (e.g., Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986; Neugarten, 1968) and social theories (e.g., Ahern, 1996; Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Brim 1992; Carstensen & Paspathi, 1993; Herzog & Markus; 1999; Turner & Troll, 1994). While biological and psychological theories are not particularly relevant to the present study, social theories attempt to explain, among other things, how and why the aged allocate their social, biological and psychological resources (i.e., how they spend their time, mental and physical energy, and finances, and how they find their place in society). This literature review focuses, then, on the social theories of aging while also summarizing pivotal research in the other areas to lend perspective and help frame the literature relevant to social theories of aging.

An offshoot of social theories is the issue of how people in old age spend their time in retirement. This third area of the literature is relevant to the present study because, since a criterion for selecting participants is involvement in a leadership activity new to the participant in her old age, it was likely that some participants had retired from a job or career before beginning the new endeavor.

Once the interviews were begun, it became apparent that the participants' views of old age and themselves in it were not consistent with the prevalent stereotypes of our society. Literature related to self-image in old age was probed to reviewed to determine if the experiences of the participants was typical or was yet another aspect in which they stood as outliers.

Finally, although the literature on leadership is vast, for the purpose of this study, the aspect of leadership considered most relevant was that which focused on women's paths to leadership.

History of Cultural Context of Aging in American Society

Anthropologists Amoss and Harrell (1981) noted that, "Every known society has a named social category of people who are old. In every case these people have different rights, duties, privileges and burdens from those enjoyed or suffered by their juniors" (p. 3). The way we view and interact with old people, how they view and interact with themselves and others, the beliefs we share about age, even the way we define old age are products of our society. In other words, old age is shaped by one's culture⁶. Some cultures define old age by life events such as the passage through "coming of age" ceremonies and rituals while others use more functional descriptions such as loss of ability to hunt or to produce children (Biesele & Howell, 1981; Keith, 1985; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995). This is actually a confounding factor in the literature. What is described

⁶ Harris (1990) defined culture as "the social heritage of a society that is transmitted to each generation; it is learned behavior that is shared by others. Culture includes all the beliefs, knowledge, and products of a society. Culture guides the life's activities of a people and may be likened to a blueprint or map of everyday living." (p. 49)

and studied as old in one culture and even in one time period is not so in another.

While Western industrialized civilization has defined age in terms of years, behavior and role prescriptions, age by the number of years one has lived is a relatively recent innovation. Prior to the sixteenth century, for example, few men or women in Europe even knew how old they were (Markson, 1997). Life expectancies are a factor in what ages were defined as "old". Shakespeare considered 40 as being in one's old age. This made sense in light of the fact that life expectancies at the time were not much over 40 to 45 years. Even up to 1900, average life expectancy in the United States was only 49, so accounts of the elderly at that time are likely different than would be expected if most Americans lived into their 80's as in 1998.⁷

There is disagreement in the historical literature as to the status of the elderly in general and women in particular in the early history of the United States. There is general agreement that old men fared better than old women in terms of social esteem. Some researchers feel that colonial views of old men were predominantly positive (Fischer, 1977; Haber, 1997; Manheimer, 1995; Sherman, 1997). Manheimer (1995) noted that "the situation for older men in seventeenth and eighteenth century New England was socially advantageous ... and very little is known about older women during this period" (p. 7). The Puritan ethic at the time called for the honoring of elders partly because of the spiritual

⁷ According to "A Profile of Older Americans 2000" (US Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Aging), Americans age 65 in 1998 could expect to live an average of 17.8 years (19.2 for women and 16.0 for men).

wisdom assumed to accompany old age as well as religious proscriptions about honoring one's parents. Land ownership and wealth gave social status to older men who were looked on as sources of information and experience necessary to survive in the new land. In addition, men derived power and commanded honor by youth whose futures they controlled through inheritance (Haber, 1997).

However, as desire for land (and the independent status it bestowed), many young men and women traveled west, leaving aging parents without familial support in old age. Old women, especially widows or those who never married, were particularly vulnerable to economic hardship and relied on neighbors or informal community assistance.

Haber believed, however, that old age has been romanticized in American historical writings and that the aged were not viewed or treated as positively as has been portrayed. She contended that that negative attitudes about old people, particularly the poor and widows existed and have persisted from colonial days to the present. Other researchers (e.g., Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995) noted that there has been no single historical trend toward a better or worse experience of old age, but that most societies held ambivalent views of aging. In agreement with Haber, Sigelman & Shaffer noted that negative views of the old, especially in relation to youth, have outweighed positive views.

There is general agreement in the literature that, whether or not negative attitudes prevailed in early American history, they do at present. There is, however, disagreement as to when and how suddenly the presumed shift occurred. Some authors (e.g., Fischer, 1977) suggested that, until about 1820,

old people were honored and held in high esteem. Fisher maintained that, “a cult of youth, which inspired Henry David Thoreau and others to debunk the supposed wisdom of age, flourished from 1820 to the 1970s” (as quoted in Manheimer, 1995, p. 12). Other historians disagreed with Fisher’s portrayal of the sudden shift in attitudes toward the elderly in the early 1800’s. For example, Achenbaum (1986) asserted that political, scientific and cultural changes after the Civil War changed American attitudes from veneration of the old for their contributions to society to negative attitudes about the elderly. Manheimer contended that, before 1900 the U.S. was an “age integrated society” but that the consensus among scholars at present is that “[e]vents, trends, legislation, and institutions that took shape after 1900 have caused the most noteworthy change in the perceived and actual status of seniors over the course of U. S. history” (p.16). By about 1900, aging began to be viewed as a social problem for both scientific and financial reasons.

A medical model beginning in the early 1900’s began to draw attention to the diseases and problems of old age. The inability to find a “cure” for the disorders and disabilities of old age, coupled with the repeated documentation of deterioration and decline based, for the most part, on research with institutionalized or sick patients (Harris, 1990; Friedan, 1993), led to the perception of the worthlessness of the aged. Physician I. L. Nascher (who coined the term geriatrics) wrote in 1909, “We realize that for all practical purposes the lives of the aged are useless, they are often a burden to themselves, their family, and the community at large” (quoted in Cole, 1992, p. 202).

At about the same time, industrialists began to find it more economically sensible to hire and invest in younger workers. Pensions were expensive and opposed by many businesses and government. Generational issues about how to spend money led to competition between the needs of the aged versus those of youth (e.g. school programs). The “modernization theory” holds that the status of old people declines with technology as culture moves from agrarian to industrial to technological, and as numbers of old people increase and have to compete for fewer jobs (Burgess, 1960; Cowgill & Holmes, 1972; Manheimer, 1995; Marshall, 1999)⁸.

A historical marker in cultural attitudes about the aged in the U.S. was the depression, during which the elderly were the first to lose their jobs. “Labor force participation rates dropped more precipitously (nearly 17percent between 1930 and 1940) for workers over sixty-five than for any other age group” (Manheimer, 1995, p.21). Because assistance was not forthcoming from businesses and charities or from individual savings, all of which had dried up, as many as two-thirds of American’s aged were dependent (U. S. Bureau of the Census, as reported in *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 1995). The social problem of aging was an issue at the forefront. The institutionalization of the Social Security Act in 1935 is a clear turning point in the history of old age and

⁸ Prior to industrialization, men and women found work on farms. Farming was the largest occupation for men until 1920; over half of all men over 65 who worked did so on farms (Manheimer, 1995). With industrialization, a higher percentage of men over 65 than under were craftsmen, peddlers or merchants, and the like. The few older women who worked outside the home generally did so as seamstresses, tailors, saloonkeepers, hotel managers or boardinghouse operators.

marks the beginning of the modern era of old age history (Cole, 1992; Sigelman & Shaffer, 1995).

Since that time, and especially since the national political campaigns of the 1970's, financial issues related to Social Security, Medicare and other aid for the aged have brought the needs of the elderly to national attention. The spotlight on the aged as takers of society's financial resources, along with scientific and medical advances that have renewed the concentration on the medicalization of old age have colluded to produce a societal view of aging as a time of decline with no redeeming social or productive value.

Technology, the fast pace of our society, the orientation of our culture to the future contribute to the present views of the aged as outdated and having little to contribute. "Progressive American society also deprives the old person of the one role he has had on most traditional cultures: the role of elder statesman who epitomizes social stability and continuity with the past. A society which treasures the ... future has little need for someone to embody the past" (Manney, J. D., Jr. cited by Harris, 1990, p. 80).

Women in the History of Aging

Not only is the definition of old age culture bound, it is also gender bound. Women are looked upon and treated as old earlier than men and have faced a different cultural history than men because of this persistent bias (Sherman, 1997). There is, however, a paucity of historical literature specific to the aging of women (Fodor & Franks, 1990; Gergen, 1990; Lippert, 1997; Stavenuiter & Bijsterveld, 2000). In referring to this lack of research, social scientist Marjorie

Chary Feinson (1985) asked, "Where are the women in the history of aging?" (p.29) and Stavenuiter & Bijsterveld (2000) added, "Where are the elderly in the history of women?" (p. 196). Gergen (cited in Lippert, p.16) observed "that it seems only men survive past the age of 40."

A look at the attitudes toward women in US history in what social historical literature does exist, reveals mixed but mostly negative images. As late as 1900, families were considered the center of social and familial support. Ruggles (1994) noted that, "In 1880, 72% of white elderly married couples and 61.2% of nonwhite couples lived with at least one of their own children" (p. 32). Older men retained the status as head of the household with the title's concomitant power and authority. Women's status was derived from their relationships. They found their social and cultural roles as spouses of heads of households, until widowhood. At that time, their social position was lost, usually along with their possessions, which were all legally their husband's. Women often became lodgers in a single room of their own homes, which were taken over by their sons who assumed the power of the family. Without the "dowager's third" (the one third of their husband's property women were allowed to inherit) or family to care for them, widows relied on community or church. Women who worked did so in professions that did not challenge male authority (e.g. teachers, clothing makers).

Although from a long historical perspective, one can find images of old women ranging from wise and powerful to insane and evil, scapegoating women as witches stands out as a low point in the social cultural history of the U.S.

Markson (1997) suggested that such treatment of old women had financial and political implications; it was not only a result of misogyny but also a way to eliminate the poor and feeble. Many of the women executed as witches were poor widows. But women who had money and property were also targets.

Markson's suggestions that politics played a role are partially based on the fact that women's property could be confiscated prior to trial and posthumously up to three generations afterwards.

A look at the literature over the past fifteen years reveals that attitudes towards old women, although not as extreme, have remained negative. It is, however, only in recent years that women's experience of aging as qualitatively different than men's has been the focus of research. One area that has been studied is the portrayal of older women in the media, portrayals that degrade and devalue older women and that reflect and continue the stereotypes of old women as being of less worth than men (Sherman, 1997). Gerbner (1993) analyzed 19,642 speaking parts on 1,371 TV shows from 1982 to 1992 and concluded that older women were "underrepresented, undervalued, and undersexed" (p. 12). Davis and Davis (1985) found that the parts played by older women are secondary to men, increasingly unimportant in terms of plot, and portrayed as unintelligent (or if intelligent, then also deferent). There is also a lack of portrayal of older women in film and what is there is generally negative. Davis and Davis also pointed out that negative stereotypes have serious implications both for aging men and women in that they lead to a denial of aging and an inability to emotionally support aging partners.

Theories of Aging

Bengston and Schaie (1999) noted the “relatively short history of gerontology as the scientific study of aging – which spans only a half century of sustained empirical research” (p8). In reviewing the literature on aging in this time period, one finds more descriptive literature than empirical studies founded on or attempting to enhance theoretical concepts. In fact, Bengston and Schaie (1997) found only 28% of the studies on aging in the literature even mentioned concomitant theories and what theories do exist lack a sense of integration within the field of aging (Madey, 2000). The theories of aging that have been articulated can be categorized for purposes of clarity and organization into three areas: biological, psychological, and social.

Biological theories. Biological theories describe the physiological changes in the aging process. There are numerous biological theories of aging each with its own set of studies and its own base of research. With very little variation, these theories view aging as a biological process of deterioration and decline, whether from genetic decomposition or dysfunction in age (Baltes & Smith, 1997). The theme of the genetic theories, for example, is that human evolutionary fitness decreases with age. The authors of these theories contend that our genetic makeup is for the purpose of reproduction in the first half of life and that, with increasing age, it is possible that there are genes within us that become dysfunctional or even harmful (Baltes & Smith, 1997).

A criticism of biological theories in general is that the variability between human beings and even with a single body makes generalization difficult

(Manheimer, 1995). Some declines can also be compensated for, which makes their effects hard to estimate. There are also differences in maturity and aging within the body. For example, kidneys tend to age faster, i.e., show diminished function, earlier than does the skin. In addition, certain physiological processes mature at different rates (e.g., hormonal maturity such as puberty occur before bone maturation).

Another problem with studies of aging and the aged has been an “acceptance of the biomedicalization of all things having to do with growing old” (Hendricks & Achenbaum, 1999, p.37). There are those who would carry this criticism further to claim that there are political and economic motivations for making old age a stage or period of life requiring its own theories and explanations rather than as a “rite or passage” with many commonalities with other life stages. Making old age a time of medical decline easily leads to the promotion of social policies that marginalize the aged and wrest control from them economically and politically (Estes, 1979; Quadagno, 1986). Baltes & Smith (1997) argued also that there is a logic problem in making biological aging a foundation of arguments that old age is nothing but a time of decline. They note, the constellation of arguments, then, cannot be taken to suggest that human aging is nothing but decline. This would be so if biological factors were the only conditions shaping the course of aging. The fact that cultural factors are operative, though at a reduced level of efficacy, entails the possibility of continued growth, selective as it may be. Moreover, the human species and its

associated cultural evolution has the power to outwit the constraints imposed by biological-genetic conditions. (p. 159)

Psychological theories. Psychological aging theories attempt to account for mental and cognitive processes in aging such as perception and intelligence, memory, reaction times, many of which also depend on physiology. Some researchers say these processes show decline in old age but others say there are too many individual differences to make such statements. Furthermore, some processes, such as creativity and problem solving, can be practiced and maintained more readily. So, there is no homogeneous pattern. Some processes decline, others remain constant, and still others, such as learned functions like vocabulary size and complexity, increase (Sternberg, 1996).

There has been a lack of focus in psychological research involving old men and especially old women. Psychoanalytic and developmental psychologists beginning with Freud have focused on development prior to what is considered old age. Old age was considered unworthy of study and what was described, especially with respect to women, was generally considered pathological. Freud believed that aging began long before the ages presently accepted as belonging in old age. In fact, he thought that menopause was a psychopathology and that women over 30 and men over 50 were unfit for psychoanalysis because their personalities were too rigid (Manheimer, 1995).

Perhaps the most influential of the adult development theorists was Erik Erikson. He described a progression through developmental stages in which the resolution of specific psychosocial crises (e.g. the resolution of integrity vs.

despair) proceeds and is built up by the next.⁹ As noted in previous sections, Erikson's early works did not take into account old age. Even Erikson realized this, and with his wife, Joan, and Helen Kivnick studied the parents of children from a 1928 study when the parents themselves were 75 to 95 years of age. They noted that earlier psychosocial themes are re-experienced in age-appropriate ways at later stages. In old age "the life cycle weaves back on itself in its entirety..." (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986, p. 56). Sheehy (1995) called this the rising spiral of life, which takes one up to self-transcendence.

Psychologists Klaus Riegel, Susan Whitbourne and Camilda Weinstock believed that psychological development is a continuous process rather than one that occurs in stages or steps. Riegel notes that, "developmental tasks are never completed. At the very moment when completion seems to be achieved, new questions and doubts arise in the individual and in society" (as quoted in Manheimer, 1995, p. 101).

The literature that itself critiques psychological theories and aspects of development and aging is contradictory as to how much prior research has been based on or is reflective of the experiences of women in general and old women in particular. For example, Secrist (1996) noted that developmental psychologist Claus Gould incorporated women's viewpoints but Freidan (1993) claimed that Gould based his work mostly on men and that he "could not see beyond the

⁹ The crisis identified in late adulthood is ego integrity versus despair. Integrity involved the ability to see one's life as meaningful, accepting one's positive and negative attributes and experiences as comprising a full life. Despair results when one does not feel one's life has been meaningful and that there is not time to change it.

giving up of 'false assumptions' of childhood, which occupy us from sixteen to forty-five" (p. 112).

The great majority of psychological research on adult development has focused on men who were then taken as the criteria for what is considered to be normal (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Manheimer, 1995; Miller, 1986; Secrist, 1996; Veeder, 1992; Wastell, 1996).

If and when scientists turn to the study of women, they typically look for ways in which women conform to or diverge from patterns found in the study of men...attributes typically associated with the masculine are valued, and articulated, while those associated with the feminine tend to be ignored (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986, as quoted in Secrist, 1996, pp. 13-14).

An early exception was Carl Jung (1923) who included both men and women in his explanations of psychological types. However, Freidan (1993) cited Jungian analysts Bruce Baker and Jane Wheelwright who noted that, "Although old age is supposed to be the psychological culmination of life for Jungians, very few old patients are written about in the Jungian journals" (p. 462).

More recently, Bernice Neugarten (1968) described social roles and norms affecting both men and women. Neugarten's extensive research in development included women in her studies, which extended the developmental research well into old age. Her work led her to believe that "chronological age is becoming a poorer and poorer predictor of the way people live" (Neugarten, 1980, p. 157) and that social policy should be based on need, not age. Sheehy

(1976, 1995) looked at adult development into old age although her writings on the very old are sparse compared to the amount devoted to any of the other stages.

It is only recently that researchers have begun to take note of and specifically study possible gender differences in life stages (Smith & Baltes, 1998). Some feminist writers since the 1970's have stressed that women's psychological development is different from men's (Chodorow, 1978; Cross & Madson, 1997; Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1986; Noddings, 1984; Secrist, 1996). Gilligan's work led her to note that men and women conceptualize the world differently and experience the world as different based on those conceptualizations. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule (1986) contended that women's epistemological sense is rooted in connectedness, while men's is rooted in logic and mastery. Miller (1986) concluded in her work that, "...women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships" (p83). Cross & Madson (1997) suggested that women see themselves as relational and that relationships are integral to thought, behavior and emotion. According to these authors, women see relationships as "integral part of their selves; their own thoughts and feelings will be understood in terms of the thoughts and feelings of close others, and the needs of others will shape their moral decisions and social interaction" (Herzog & Markus, 1999, p. 237). The major theme of all of these authors is that women's lives are based on relationships and connectedness to others, due in part to the fact "that women

lead lives that have been traditionally subordinate, primarily focused on support of others" (Secrist, 1996, p. 17).

Social theories. Early work in social gerontology was problem oriented and focused almost entirely on problems of old age. Later researchers have looked at how one maintains both a sense of well-being and active involvement as one ages. Herzog and Markus (1999) and Turner and Troll (1994) suggested that the variation found in life span, as reflected in social psychological and developmental theories, points to the fact that psychological decline in old age is a social construction. Expectations about oneself in old age are formed, in part, "by popular theories about the course of the average life cycle... which typically show expected decline or stability but almost never increase in the late part of the life span" (p. 238).

The direction of one's time and energy (movement towards goals) is dependent on self-concept, influenced by our social and cultural environment (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Brim 1992; Carstensen & Paspathi, 1993). Thus, how one perceives of and defines oneself in old age determines the frame around which one structures the experiences of life and, therefore, how one invests time, energy, and use of resources in old age (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Brim, 1992; Carstensen & Paspahi, 1993; Hartranft, 1992).

With respect to age, then, the social and cultural influence on self determines not only our behavior, but also how we use the resources around us. This is also determined to a fair extent by the societally held expectations that most characteristics will decline at worst or simply remain stable at best. There is

little research other than recent studies on the growth of brain cells in adults as old as 70 (Scherr, 2000) that gives hope or expectation of increase in function in the later years of one's life.

There are several social theories of aging that seek to explain how and why one structures and organizes one's life and how one constructs and works toward goals (Lippert, 1997). For example, the Socioemotional Selectivity theory (Baltes & Carstensen, 1999) purports that the seeking of knowledge and emotional regulation are paramount and that the activation of specific goals is dependent on how one perceives one's social psychological, and cognitive condition. For example, as one ages, the perceived reduction in time reorganizes one's goals to the pursuit of more short-term rather than long-term goals; that is, taking care of one's health and how one feels becomes more important than information seeking.

Key studies in the use of time by the aged have focused on activities of daily living and functional abilities (Ahern, 1996, p. 20). Ahern classified these studies into three major theories to explain activity in the aging person: activity theory, disengagement theory and continuity theory. The oldest and most widespread of the social theories of aging is known as activity theory. First proposed by Burgess (1960), activity theory held that the greater the activity, the greater the life satisfaction of the aged. "Activity theory has drawn early attention to activities as an important factor in adaptation to aging because they allow expression of new selves" (Lemon, Bengsten, & Peterson, 1972, quoted in Bengston & Schaie, 1999, p243). In addition, performance in productive activities

is seen as related to a sense of competence (Glass, Seeman, Herzog, Kahn, & Berkman, 1995). Although activity theory is said to be relevant to all ages, "this is even more important for aged because their health and social well-being are dependent on remaining active" (O'Reilly, 1994, p. 19). The irony is that, "In essence, Burgess viewed retired people as having 'no vital function to perform'" (O'Reilly, 1994, p. 60) and that society thrust that role on the aged, who eventually accepted it.

A more controversial theory is the disengagement theory (Cummings & Henry, 1961) that focuses on decreased activity with age and the phasing out of societal roles by mutual agreement with the society so that their death is not as disruptive to the society. Decreasing activity level was also said to have increased life satisfaction (an obviously direct contradiction to activity theory).

Researchers have been pointing out flaws in these social theories of aging for decades (Van Zandt, 1991). Activity and disengagement theories do not encompass enough to be overall theories and some theories came from work with younger populations (Van Zandt, 1991). In addition, these theories do not account for variations with ethnicity, gender, social status or cohort effects. Different historical cohorts, different ethnic and social classes have different experiences and so must be researched separately, not as a homogeneous group with assumed homogeneous experiences (O'Rand & Krecker, 1990; Riley, Johnson, & Foner, 1972; Uhlenberg, 1992).

Another theory actually came out of the work by Havighurst, Neugarten & Tobin (1968) who studied personality and behaviors of the same group as

Cummings and Henry. They developed a theory of continuity to explain activity in old age. "Their results indicated that in normal men and women there was no sharp discontinuity of personality with age but an increasing consistency instead. ...Essentially, Cumming's and Henry's subjects became more like themselves rather than less as they aged" (Ahern, 1996, p. 21). This conclusion was supported by Maddox (1968) who found consistency of activity level throughout life. For example, those who have been actively involved in their communities continue to do so. Activities and roles found in work are later found in the types of activities pursued in old age and retirement (Price, 1998). Those who took on caretaker roles in earlier life stages continue in old age.

Continuity is a theme in other aspects of aging research as well. Price (1998) describes a well-known case study by Kaufman (1993) that looked at identity maintenance in older adults. Kaufman found significant continuity in sources of identities and values (e.g., achievement, social usefulness) in later life, despite many "changes and challenges" throughout their lives. "Kaufman identified this continuity as the 'ageless self,' asserting that older adults, ' . . . have the ability to reformulate lifelong values so that they (a) take on new meaning in old age, (b) promote a sense of continuity of self, and (c) contribute to an integrated and salient account of the life course" (Kaufman, 1993, p. 24, quoted by Price, 1998, p. 154). In her study of 14 women, Price also noted continuity in identities and self-concept in her participants.

Holahan (1994) noted that levels of activity, "active orientations", e.g., achievement orientation/goal orientation, and well being observed during the

career phases of women's lives were also observed in their old age. Holahan's findings, however, were based on data from the Terman Study of the Gifted, a long-term study of over 1500 males and females born around 1911 who scored above 135 on Stanford IQ tests. Their test scores placed them in the top 1% of the nation in terms of IQ; they clearly are not representative of the general population in this respect and may have issues and opportunities not reflective of those without their intellectual gifts. She did find significant differences in men and women at age 70 in terms of feelings of goal attainment; women had lower feelings of success in this area, a fact that may reflect the limitations in options available for women in this historical cohort (Holahan, 1985).

Flett (1998) looked at values over the life span. Her findings indicated that, although priorities changed with age, values remained consistent throughout the participant's lives. She did not, however, attempt to find gender differences. Her study included only four men and six women.

Related to continuity theory is the theme of discontinuity, which describes the starts and stops associated with the life cycle, especially for women. According to discontinuity theory, the adaptation skills learned through dealing with life changes during adulthood (e.g., moving from one job to another, relocating, family losses, having children, children leaving home) prepare one for easier transitions in old age. Although it seems counterintuitive, discontinuity actually follows from continuity theory in that the lessons learned and skills achieved through experiencing the discontinuities in one's life are built upon and used in later life, making for a continuous process of adaptation and a continuity

of self-identity in old age. Atchley (1993), for example, found that even though older adults may experience changes in roles and positions (as in retirement), their sense of self is not frequently changed. It is the contention of some writers that the start and stop nature of women's changing life experiences helps them better make adaptations necessary in old age (Bateson, 1989; Friedan, 1993; Neugarten, 1968; Price, 1998). "Older adults draw from their former roles, their current roles, and knowledge of themselves as sources of identity. Considering women's multiple sources of self-definition, stability in identity is not so surprising" (Price, 1998, p. 117).

Social gerontologists Jacobs, Gubrium & Hochschild (1975) took yet another approach to research on aging: a phenomenological and ethnographic case study approach. They focused on the meaning of life and aging attributed by the aged themselves. Their approach meets the criticisms of the other theories in that it individualizes aging and treats the aged as a heterogeneous population.

[There is] no such thing as a typical aging person. People don't generally stop being themselves and suddenly turn into the old person, that fits into society's myths and stereotypes. Instead the psychosocial factors that effect people when they are young, persist throughout the life cycle" (Harris & Associates, Inc., 1975, pp. 20-21)

Retirement

In the 1950's sociologists described retirement as the "roleless role" (Walker, 1982). Those who left the workplace were viewed as economically

nonproductive even though they may have contributed time, experience and expertise in other ways (Kendig, 1986). Sociologist Burgess (1960) considered that retired people had no vital function to perform, a societal belief that the retired person himself or herself came to accept. Some researchers say that this view of retirement as an unproductive time of life and the retired as dependent takers of society's resources persists (e.g., Freidan, 1993; Manheimer, 1995; Uhlenberg, 1992; Warburton & Rosenman, 1995).

Studies aimed at retirement as a phenomenon have looked at how and why people retire (e.g., Dorfman, 1989; Perkins, 1992), what retirement means to those contemplating or in retirement (e.g., Hatch, 1992) and the attitudes and experiences of those who are retired (e.g., Midanik, Soghikian, Ransom, & Tekawa, 1995). Conclusions in the literature are inconsistent; some find that retirement is a time of continued or increased well-being while others find it a time of psychological pain and difficulty (Kim & Moen, 2001).

Little is known, however, about what women actually do in retirement for several reasons (Snyder, 1998). Most research on retirement has been on men, partly due to the fact that women are a relatively recent addition to the history of employment and to the historically low labor force participation rates of women. Prior to World War II, occupations available for women were, for the most part, limited to nursing, teaching and secretarial jobs. "Women comprised 18% of the labor force in 1890, 44% in 1965, 55% in 1985, 60% in 1990" (Carp, 1997, p. 112). Even with the inclusion of other professional careers that have opened up for women since the 1940's and 1950's, women's careers have been

characterized by stops and starts as they married and bore children and attended to care-giving activities¹⁰. In addition, the social contexts of their work history have been different, financial considerations are different than those of men. Their experiences of retirement may, therefore, be different from those of men (Brozowski, K. 1998; Calasanti, 1996; Carp, 1997; Perkins, 1992; Price, 1998).

If women were included in earlier research on retirement, it was for the purpose of asking them about their husbands (Price, 1998; Szinovacs, 1982). Researchers in the past seemed to accept the premise that identity rests in the work place for men but in social roles and relationships for women. "There's a notion that retirement isn't going to be hard for women, because their lives involve more than a job, and they take care of a home and people... That's utter nonsense" (Robert Weiss as quoted by Gardner, 1997). Indeed, even recent retirement research has been carried out using an "androcentric model" (Price, 1998) using the experiences of men and simply comparing how women's experiences are similar or different.

Some studies have looked at men and women's perceptions of retirement (though not their actual experiences (Keddy & Singleton, 1991; Prentis, 1980; Szinovacz, 1983). Others have researched gender differences in retirement satisfaction (Seccombe & Lee, 1986; George, Fillenbaum, & Palmore, 1984) or

¹⁰ According to the Older Women's League (Ossofsky, 2000), "the average woman now spends 11.5 years out of the workforce to attend to caregiving responsibilities.

gender differences in retirement transitions (Hanson & Wapner, 1994; Matthews & Brown, 1998; Van Zandt, 1991). However, most gender comparison studies (Calasanti, 1993, Erdner & Guy, 1990; Onyx & Benton, 1994) do not account for diversity within genders or differing occupational status (Price, 1998).

Our population has aged, health in old age has increased, and longevity (and, therefore, length of retirement has increased) has increased. Reactions to and about retirement have become more positive, however, at least as late as 1995 our societal view of retirement had not changed a great deal. Warburton & Rosenman (1995), in their study of 636 men and women, found that both men and women equated retirement with unproductivity, uselessness, incapacity, old age and ill health. "These were strong images and reflect an outmoded view of time when few people lived long enough to enjoy retirement" (Warburton & Rosenman, 1995, p14).

There have been inconsistent findings with respect to self-concept in retirement. As noted above, Price found continuity in self-concept in the women in retirement whom she studied. Storrer (1998), on the other hand, found that the five men in her study indicated stable self-concept in retirement while the seven women reported great change in theirs.

Volunteerism in Retirement. Matthews & Brown (1988) and Keddy & Singleton (1991) found an increase of activities for women in retirement in terms of community activities, hobbies and exercise. However, "While the stereotypical image of the volunteer is an upper- or middle-class white homemaker, Winfred Dowling reported that a number of studies show that older women are only

slightly more likely to volunteer than men and that, in general, older people are less likely to volunteer than younger age groups" (Coyle, 1997, p. xvii).

Keith (1982) found differences in retired women and homemakers in the importance of involvement in formal organizations. She suggested that such involvement by retired women helped compensate for the loss of and provided for continuity of workplace skills and social relationships. Price (1998), who conducted one of the few recent qualitative studies of women's actual experiences in retirement, found four stages of retirement described by the women in her study. The third stage (re-establishing order) included time management, increased community involvement, and expansion of roles by developing and increasing existing social roles, or substituting or discovering alternative ones, including mentor, teacher, and community board member (almost all volunteer positions).

I was only able to find one reference specifically on leadership in older adult volunteers (Britnall-Peterson, 1995). Britnall-Peterson's qualitative study found that older adult volunteers became leaders in the organizations in which they volunteered for reasons associated with the match of organizational to personal values and the level of personal commitment to the organization.

Self-image in Old Age

A search for studies on self-image specific to healthy women in old age yielded little fruit. Most of the research studies that have been conducted over the last 25 years have focused on the self-image of the chronically ill, institutionalized, or clinically depressed old (e.g., Berger, 1983; Dyeson, 1997;

Garner, 1998; Ivanko, 1990; Maiden, 1980; McCallum, 1996). These studies reveal the generally poor self-image of these populations and some speculate on the cause of these negative images of self in old age. Garner (1998), for example, pointed out that negative self-image in depressed patients reflected the negative image held by the society around them of the elderly. Although Garner did point to a few positive images of old age, all of the examples cited were men (Picasso, Verdi, Matisse).

Reflected self-image can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy (Levin & Levin, 1980; Palmore, 1999) with respect to the stereotypes of aging. Having been socialized for a lifetime to negative stereotypes, individuals in old age can come to accept the negative in themselves and act accordingly (Montague, 1977).

There is some evidence, however, that older women's self-image improves with age, especially compared to men (Clark & Anderson, 1967) either due to increased social contacts or increased assertiveness with age (Lowenthal, Thurnher & Chiribaga, 1975). Giarrusso, Mabry & Bengston (2001) pointed out that studies of self-efficacy (the sense of self-control and one's effect on others) have shown conflicting results, revealing both higher and reduced levels depending on the study. They acknowledged the possibility that self-efficacy might be susceptible to the effects of other variables such as gender and ethnicity but noted that further research must be done in this area.

Whitbourne (1999) and others have shown that those who age the most "successfully" change their behavior in response to age but do not drastically

change their sense of identity over time. And they do not think of themselves as “old.”

There is a lack of suitable criteria for defining old age. Even the federal government considers those over age 40 to be “older workers” while it has established age 72 as the age at which Social Security benefits are not reduced for earnings. Biological markers such as menopause used to be used as indicators of old age for women, making their assent into old age far earlier than what has been considered old for men. Stavenuiter & Bijsterveld (2000) noted that even physical appearance has been used as a marker for old age but such factors as health, successive pregnancies, socioeconomic status (in terms of differences in jobs requiring physical labor) can cause wide variations in the age at which one begins to look “old.”

Hazan (1994) pointed out, one way to define old age is by self-definition (one is old when one regards oneself as such). Coe's (1967) research with nursing home residents whose average age was 81 found only 17% willing to classify themselves as “old.” Lacking a societally agreed upon definition of old age, a large number of those over age 75 assert that they are not old (Palmore, 1999). Thompson, Itzin & Abendstern (1990) conducted interviews with elderly participants and found that the participants held the same prejudices as younger people about old age. Moreover, they did not consider themselves “old.” This is not surprising. Who would wish to claim the label when it has such negative connotations?

[Given] the fact that so many old people themselves have lived a lifetime of fear, contempt, and patronizing of the old, it is easy to see why most old people 'share with other members of society the stereotypical view of old people' and also refuse to define themselves as old. (MacDonald & Rich, 1991, p. 55)

Women's Paths to Leadership

There appears to be an emphasis in the literature on women's paths to leadership on the gender bias against female leadership (e.g. Tharenou, Latimer & Conroy, 1994) and on finding the steps necessary to achieve leadership positions in various fields such as business, politics or education (e.g. see Catalyst, 1998; Helgeson, 1990; Gallagher & Golant, 2000). Among other things, women are told to obtain mentors and are urged to network with both men and other women.

Several recent research studies focused on women's career paths to leadership in the traditionally female career field of education (e.g. Muskopf, 1998; Roubanis, 2000). Teaching has been a career option for women for a long time. However, women's ascent to leadership, especially at higher levels of administration, has been longer in coming. A look at how women arrived at the leadership positions may give us a clue as to how women might find their way into leadership in other areas and for other than career advancement.

Not surprisingly, studies that looked at the obstacles faced and assistance received in the achievement of leadership positions indicate the importance of support systems, whether they be familial, social, or through professional mentors. Cipres (1999) following case studies of Latina community college presidents found several commonalities among the women including role models in the form of significant family members, support of her husband, community service orientation, strong desire to achieve, and participatory leadership style. The women in Roubanis' (2000) study of presidents of institutes of higher education identified as two of the themes for their rise to presidency the opportunity to lead and the motivation to give voice to under-represented groups.

While one might expect a particular and consciously determined prescribed path to professional leadership, among the themes revealed by Muskopf's (1998) profiles of women school superintendents was the theme of "serendipity as the guide," meaning that the women she studied did not plan in detail the paths of their careers or their jobs subsequent to entering teaching; i.e. their careers "just happened." Again, in Muskopf's work as in previously mentioned research, mentors played a large role in initiating change in the lives of the women studied.

Summary

A difficulty with present research on the aged is that, although most researchers treat old age as a homogeneous phenomenon, none has yet to define or explain old age for everyone. There are gender, socio-economic, and

ethnic variables not accounted for, to name a few. Research and theories of aging have typically depicted old age as a time of decline and deterioration and little has been done to look at what, by these standards, are considered the outliers of past research findings. A small literature of narrative accounts exists about older women but almost without exception these are not analyzed in any way to find themes and underlying concepts but are simply reported as mini-portraits or anecdotes. None that I have come across to date have looked at women involved in leadership in old age. This fact plus the discrepancies and reported variations in findings as noted in this section reinforce the need for a study of old women who are vital, vibrant leaders and who, having taken on new challenges at this time of their lives, defy the stereotypes.

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to the study by first placing the present project within the historical context of the study of women in old age. Next, the present theories of old age, including biological, psychological theory, and social theories, were reviewed. Finally, the literature review emerged with a look at the literature on women's retirement, including volunteerism in retirement, and self-concept in old age and their path to leadership at any age.

Chapter Three presents a summary of the findings of a preliminary study that preceded the present narrative qualitative study. Methodological procedures that evolved from the preliminary to the present study are described with a discussion of narrative analysis and analysis of narrative used to analyze the data obtained from the participant interviews. The human subjects concerns

according to the University of San Diego Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects. Limitations of the present study are delineated.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this narrative qualitative study was to give voice to the experiences of women who are demonstrating leadership in endeavors that are new to them in their old age. The objectives of the study were: 1) to obtain life story narratives from each woman in an effort to document the experiences, decisions and insights that led to these endeavors at this stage in their lives; 2) to examine the themes that emerge from these life stories; and 3) to integrate the narratives and themes in a way that will further our understanding of the potential contributions of older women in our society. The research questions this study addressed were: 1) How have women begun their involvement in new leadership endeavors in their old age? 2) What life experiences prepared them to take up these pursuits? 3) What are the similarities among the women in both motivating factors and the means by which they carried out their choices? 4) What obstacles did they face and what assistance did they receive in pursuing these choices? 5) How do women leaders in old age relate on a personal and emotional level to the term "old age"?

A preliminary study was conducted in the spring of 2001 to determine whether the methodology would yield usable information. The format of the interviews, the use of a timeline of life highlights as a first question, and some interview prompts were all developed and used in interviews with two women,

aged 73 and 80. Interviews were transcribed and coded for key concepts and themes. Coding proceeded back and forth between the interviews as themes emerged. Ideas and concepts were clustered in a domain analysis (Spradley, 1979) with clusters representing major categories and individual ideas within the clusters treated as subcategories. Analysis of the resulting coding schemes from these interviews revealed similarities between the two women in terms of both the motivating factors for undertaking new endeavors, a history of success and productivity, and the adaptation of characteristics and personality traits developed earlier in their lives for use in their present endeavors.

In addition, both women revealed similar attitudes and opinions regarding old age as a positive time of life. These attitudes and opinions reflected an enthusiasm for life they believe they held prior to old age and the fact that they both faced old age with a positive outlook. They were not only willing to try new ventures at this time in their lives but also resisted viewing themselves as a stereotypical taker of society's assets.

By coincidence, both women in the preliminary study had career histories in education; both had been schoolteachers and principals. This may not be a total coincidence since many job opportunities available to women now were limited when the two women in the preliminary study entered the work force. At that time, professional roles for women generally were limited to teaching, nursing and secretarial work. Nevertheless, an attempt was made in the present study to interview women in fields other than education.

The sample of participants in the complete study was more diverse in other ways as well. For instance, the preliminary study specifically limited the subject population to women in their 70's and 80's. As it turned out, this was an arbitrary limitation. For the present study, the only age criterion for participation was our societally-recognized criterion for old age: age 65 or older.

In addition to the extension of the age criterion, one other modification was made following the preliminary study. Attempts were made to keep interviews as conversational and informal as possible. However, based on comments made by the women in the preliminary study, specific questions were added to the prompts for all interviews to ensure that the women gave their opinions on and feeling about old age and retirement. In addition, the women were specifically asked what advice they would give to other women in old age.

Participants

Selection Criteria. The participants for this study were women over age 65 who, in their old age, had undertaken a new endeavor involving leadership. There were four qualifications for participation in the study. First, the participant had to be female. Second, participants had to be an age that we, as a society, consider "old", i.e., over age 65. Third, participants had to have been involved in an endeavor involving leadership that, fourth, was new to them in their old age.

At least two of the above criteria may require some elaboration. The third qualification, that the participant must have been involved in an endeavor involving leadership, meant that the women were leaders by virtue of their adaptive work in their own aging, leaders in terms of their positions in groups or

organizations, or leaders in that they were involved in an activity or organization in which they mobilized others to some sort of change, including change in attitude, policy, or belief.

Some positive and negative examples may shed light on this qualification. A woman who, at age 80, took up a hobby such as painting would be an interesting person with whom to have a conversation about her art. She would not, however, be included as a participant in the study unless she who in some way used her art in some form of leadership. For example, if she developed a new or innovative painting technique and write about, spoke about or taught that technique to others, thereby having a positive or generative effect on the art and lives of others in the broader society, she would then have been eligible to be a participant in this study.

Here is another example: There may be numerous examples of women in old age who find themselves in positions of leadership within their homes. For example, a grandmother who finds herself in a position where she must raise a grandchild could surely be seen as having undertaken an endeavor involving leadership. However, for the purpose of this study, “leadership endeavors” was further defined as activities that took a woman outside of her home and family.¹¹

The fourth criterion intentionally eliminated those who had been involved in their vocation or avocation for many years and simply continued it into later

¹¹ In deference to full-time parents whose chosen vocation keeps them within their home and family – and I was one for years – the qualifications for inclusion in this study in no way negate or diminish the importance of or leadership necessary to do this important job. And, while it could be argued that the influence of a parent (or grandparent) on a child has far-reaching societal implications, the necessary debate on the validity of labeling such activities as societal leadership is outside the scope of this study. Therefore, activities solely for one’s home or family were not counted as a qualification for participation in this study.

years. Continuing an ongoing activity into old age is qualitatively different in terms of motivation, obstacles and experience than actually taking up something new at an age when our culture tells us we should be shutting down and turning inward. In fact, I did interview one woman who had been eager to participate in the study. Although she had led a successful and fulfilling life filled with numerous examples of leadership, her activities after age 65 did not fit the criteria. I sincerely wished to write about her because of her numerous accomplishments in her field of nursing education and because of her political activism that sparked great changes in her field. However, despite the fact that since turning 65 she had volunteered many hours per week in a hospital pharmacy and at a local museum, I could not reconcile her tasks in these volunteer positions as constituting leadership in the generative sense defined for purposes of this study.

While comparing the experiences of continuing an ongoing activity into old age and beginning a new one in old age would be interesting and such a comparison could be undertaken in a possible future study, it is beyond the scope of the present study.

Selection Procedures. "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases ($n = 1$), selected *purposely*" (Patton, 1998, p. 169). This study utilized a form of purposeful sampling (Patton, 1998). Merriam (1998) explains that in using purposeful sampling, the researcher attempts to "discover, understand and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 61). It is not the intent of the

researcher in this type of study to get an “average opinion” rather it is to obtain “information-rich cases from which one can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (Merriam, 1998, p. 61).

A convenience sample of nine participants was obtained. One type of purposeful sampling that was employed in this study is known as snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 1990). In this method of participant selection, participants identify others they know who might meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. Initial subjects were generated by word of mouth by asking friends and colleagues for possible referrals. I began the process by talking to personal and professional contacts. In addition, I made a point of meeting people whom I knew they might be aware of active older women in the area. For example, I attended a local university function honoring several area women for their achievements and at the function introduced myself to the woman at the function who was representing and presenting information about the Older Women’s League. One of the participants was a direct referral from her. In addition, she referred me to a woman who was active in the African American community who referred me to two African American women who she thought fit the criteria. Two participants came from this referral. Participants in the study also referred me to their professional and personal contacts who they thought might fit the criteria for inclusion in the study and who might be interested in participating.

As mentioned, I did make a point to try to achieve a somewhat diverse sample population. Two women were African American, one was Native American and 6 were Caucasian. Their ages ranged from 68 to 83. Although I did

not ask, it was related through their interviews that several religious backgrounds and beliefs were represented. One participant is a nun, two are married, three are widows, two are divorced, one is a lesbian.

Although jobs available to women when these women were in their job-seeking years were limited, I sought for some diversity in terms of their jobs and careers. One participant was an accountant, one an artist, one a homemaker, one worked in social services, one was a real estate broker and interior designer, and three were teachers or professors.

Sites

Prior to each interview, potential participants were contacted by telephone with the intent to introduce the purpose and nature of the study. If the potential participant met the criteria for inclusion and was agreeable to be interviewed, an appointment was made for the interview to take place. Participants were interviewed at a time that was convenient for them and at a place of their choosing. One participant was interviewed at her place of employment. The rest were interviewed in their homes.

Research Procedure

This study was conducted through oral life story interviews. Life stories as defined by Goodson (1998) "comprise the person's account of his/her life (most often delivered orally) at a particular point in time" (p11). He noted further that these "... lived experience[s] can themselves be used as the sites wherein and whereby we interrogate the social world theoretically and critically" (p4). Goodson differentiates between life stories and life histories by noting that the life story is a

reflection of the subject's view of his or her life told at a particular point in time. Life histories add "data drawn from other people's accounts, official records and transcripts, and a range of historical documentation" (p. 11). The additional data that might be drawn for life history was not the focus of this study. Rather, it was the intent of this study to understand the participant's account of her life as it relates to her activities in old age.

Before beginning each interview, the purpose of the study was reviewed with the participants and a consent form as approved by the University of San Diego Committee on the Protection of Human Subjects was read to and signed by each participant. All interviews were tape-recorded. I wrote field notes at the time of the interviews and immediately after the interviews. The field notes included my observations and descriptions of the participant, her home or work environment, my observations of her emotions as displayed by tone, volume, intonation, body language, smiles, laughter, or tears. Field notes also recorded my own impressions of the interview, the participant and my own emotional reactions and responses to the participant or the content of the interview.

Because it was my intention to limit each interview to approximately 45 minutes (primarily so as not to tire the participants and to be respectful of their time), it was anticipated that a series of up to three interviews might be conducted with each participant. However, the interviews turned out to be both pleasant and non-taxing for the participants and the time frame had been an arbitrary limit. At the end of the first 45 minutes or so, neither the participants nor I wished to cut off the interview. Participants were asked if they were interested in

continuing or in rescheduling another interview or in ending their participation in the study at that point. All enthusiastically agreed to continue. With agreement and permission by the participants, interviews went past the earlier designated time limit to one and a half to two hours or more.

Interviews were informal and unstructured. Interviews were conversational in nature and began with open-ended questions designed to get the subjects "talking about their lives, experiences, or understandings" (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p. 178). It was the intent of this study to keep interviews throughout the study as conversationally natural as possible, keeping in mind the contrasts between natural conversation and interview conversation as noted by Spradley (1979). These contrasts include the following: 1) Conversation is a give-and-take experience between conversational partners whereas in an interview setting, it is expected that the interviewee will do more talking than the interviewer; 2) in conversation, assumptions are made about what the other person knows and that information is omitted from the conversation whereas in an interview, the interviewee is encouraged to discuss and explain what the interviewer may already know; 3) in conversation, repetition is kept to a minimum but in an interview, repetition is permitted, if not encouraged, for the sake of clarification.

It had been my intention to begin each initial interview by asking participants to describe a time line of significant events in their lives and to elaborate on the events they chose to highlight in that time line. The thought was that the time line would be both a linear guide for the rest of the interview and a clue as to the priorities and interests of the participants. However, although each

interview did begin by asking the participant to give a timeline of the highlights of her life, no participant actually completed a written timeline. In fact, beyond one or two initial highlights, as will become apparent in the next chapter in the narrative analyses, each participant's story emerged with a unique individual flare. For example, some spoke at length about childhood and early adulthood. Some omitted altogether any reference to childhood.

Although it was my original intention to build subsequent interviews around open-ended questions such as, "Tell me about what you are doing in your life now that interests you most," this question was posed or the answer emerged without prompting in every initial interview. As interviews progressed, other interview strategies included asking for description or examples. For example, subjects were asked questions such as, "Describe some obstacles you've overcome" "Give an example of how someone or something that encouraged you or stood in your way."

Patton (1990) noted that while data analysis of informal conversational interviews can be difficult because information collected may differ from participant to participant, the strength of this type of interview lies in the "salience and relevance of questions" (p. 288). An interview guide approach, on the other hand, can alleviate gaps in data but "important and salient topics may be inadvertently omitted." A combination of these approaches was used to take advantage of the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of these two types of interview techniques. Interviews were kept informal and conversational and, in the event that topics of interest to the study were not included in the participants'

stories, they were asked specific questions to prompt responses in those areas (See Appendix B).

Consequently, as the series of interviews proceeded with each participant, and as coding themes and categories emerged, interview questions became more structured in order to clarify information or to add more specific information to themes that had emerged from previous data.

Following each interview, tapes were transcribed verbatim and field notes typed. In several cases, participants gave me additional materials such as newspaper articles that had been written about them, copies of awards they had received, and lists of their accomplishments that they had written for previous interviewers.

Participants were told at the time of the interview that they would be given the opportunity to review and amend and/or comment on all transcripts, a form of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When all the interviews were completed and transcribed, participants were contacted by telephone and asked if the transcripts could be mailed to them for their review. Each transcript was mailed with an additional letter of thanks and explanation and a request to send transcripts back in an enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope (see Appendix).

I received reviewed transcripts from seven of the participants. In addition, two of the three who returned the transcript, and one who did not, called me with additional information or comments or just to say hello or to tell me that they had received the packets and were in the process of reviewing them. Five of the

seven who returned the transcripts also added more about their activities since the time of the interview or about activities they had not covered in the interviews.

I was unable to reach one participant even after repeated attempts and since she had no answering machine or voice mail on which to leave messages, the transcripts were mailed to her with the letter of thanks and explanation without the introduction of the event through a phone call. She returned the transcript within ten days.

Analysis of Data

Data from participants' interviews were analyzed and presented in two ways: narrative analysis and analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Narrative analysis. Polkinghorne notes that, in narrative analysis, data gathered through the relating of one's life events is to be integrated by the researcher in such a way as "to configure the data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose" (p. 13). As delineated by Sykes (1998),

"The steps to developing the emplotted narrative from the data are as follows:

- ❖ Specify the outcome or denouement to which the story will lead.
- ❖ Arrange the data elements chronologically.
- ❖ Identify which data elements are contributors to the identified outcome.
- ❖ Construct a plot outline.
- ❖ Fill in the outline with detail from data elements.

- ❖ Adjust outline, where necessary, to better fit the data.
- ❖ Collect additional data, where necessary, in fill in 'gaps'." (p. 77)

As interviews were conducted and analyzed, I borrowed from the methodology known as portraiture in that I listened for a story as opposed to a more ethnological approach of listening to a story (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Thus, the thoughts, events and insights described by the participants in their interviews are presented as an emplotted narrative reflecting "order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 16). The resulting individual narratives reflecting the life experiences of each participant, including quotes from interview transcripts and excerpts from field notes when possible and applicable are included in the following chapter.

Analysis of narrative. Although each participant was treated as an individual narrative in the first phase of data analysis described above, the second phase, i.e., the analysis of narrative phase, constitutes a cross-case analysis. Each transcript was coded with an eye to emergent themes and "epiphanies," described by Denzin (1989) as "existentially problematic moments in the lives of individuals" (p. 129). Denzin indicates that the search for epiphanies is especially important in the kind of study I am attempting, i.e., the gathering of life stories.

The kind of coding that was completed on each transcript is well described in the social science research literature (e.g., Spradley, 1979; Patton, 1990; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Glesne, 1999). According to these authors, codes are

generated inductively following a recursive process of moving back and forth from the interviews until one obtains a set of codes that is useful for adequately characterizing the data and accomplishing the intent of the study (Sykes, 1998). In this process I looked for key ideas, topics and constructs that became recognizable across the women's stories. These are presented in Chapter 5 in the form of themes from which one can draw summaries and conclusions common to the women's stories.

On the basis of findings from the preliminary study and initial literature review, I anticipated that themes such as support systems, involvement to help others achieve goals, and positive feelings about old age might be relevant categories useful for initial coding. Of course, no attempt was made to impose coding on transcript data that could not support those categories.

As it turned out, transcripts were coded several times, first immediately after they were typed using the coding scheme from the preliminary study. However, as the interviews were being completed and analysis began, additional coding categories became evident. For example, most of the women faced severe medical challenges either in the past or at the time of the interview or both. These challenges, their reactions to them, and the degree to which the challenges interfered or did not interfere with their leadership were coded for further analysis. In addition, many of the women gave me copies of articles that had been written about them or biographies they had made for other interviewers or articles. So, as in the preliminary study, coding was "a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e.

observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature that are applicable to [the] research process” (Glesne, 1999).

Human Subjects Concerns Related to Sample Selection

All interviews were conducted according to University of San Diego Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects guidelines. Compliance with Subjects’ Risks/Benefits policy follows:

- a. Potential Risks: Other than minimal risk to subjects of possible mild fatigue from interviews and minimal risk of loss of confidentiality, there was no risk to participants than participants would encounter in daily living. Since interviews were conducted outside of the work environment and after working hours, an employer approval letter is not required.
- b. Risk Management: Participants could withdraw from the study at any time and in the event a participant withdrew from the study, data collected prior to withdrawal would not have been used. Because all interview data was collected in person, the researcher was present with the participants and, therefore, available to discuss any questions or problems that may have arisen as they happened. Unless specifically requested by participants to use real names, pseudonyms for participants were used in all interview notes, tape recordings, field notes, memos, drafts, and in the final report. Computer disks, tape recordings, and notes were kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s home. Any data kept on the researcher’s hard drive on her computer will be deleted when the final

report is approved. All data stored in the locked cabinet will be destroyed in 5 years.

While the age of the subjects classifies them as special subjects, and while old age might be seen as a problem in a research context because of a research study's potential to tax the health of the subjects, the particular subjects chosen for this study are the exceptions to the rule. They are outliers for whom vitality, achievement and vibrancy are distinguishing characteristics. While the researcher was sensitive to fatigue factors, any such problems that one might anticipate from the aged population would be expected to be minimized by the choice of subjects. All participants were given the researcher's phone number and email address. In addition, if additional information or help was necessary for any unanticipated problems that may occur, the researcher had access to two clinical social workers who have worked with the aged and who were willing to be on-call for participants of this study.

c. Potential Benefits: Participation in the study empowered participants to express their life triumphs and provide the opportunity to reflect on and frame their life experiences in a positive light. An additional benefit for participants of this study was the opportunity to add to a body of knowledge about women in old age. Findings provide new insight and contribute to the body of knowledge about female adult development in the aging population, about leadership in old age, and about possible leadership roles for older women in our society. The women studied might

also serve as role models for other aging women and men. The study provides insights and implications for social programs for the elderly and may help insure that such programs meet the needs of the older women they serve and contribute to allowing these women to become or remain productive contributors to our society.

d. Risk/Benefit Ratio: The anticipated benefits of this study outweighed the potential minimal risk to participants. Participants benefited by being given a forum to express their life experiences in a positive framework that may prove inspiring to others. The stories told may also impact social programs for the aged by adding to the body of knowledge about aged women. The information from this study may benefit counseling and social service professionals who work with aged women. To date there is a paucity of literature and research about this population.

e. Expense to Subjects: There was no expense to participants in this study with the exception of the time spent in interviews or reviewing transcripts.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the small number of subjects in this study, there was no attempt to generalize the findings to other women or men in old age. It was not the purpose of this study to confirm or substantiate theory. In fact, I intentionally studied outliers to present theory and social expectations. However, it is my hope that the study will shed light on the experiences of old women in a way that cannot be viewed in such detail using other forms of investigation. By narrowing the focus to a small number of women, I believe that what may have been lost in

terms of lack of breadth of sample population data was more than compensated for by the richness and depth of data obtained via comprehensive face-to-face interviews. Qualitative studies such as this are necessary to give women in old age a voice in contributing to our knowledge of their experience. Researchers can use this data as a foundation for both quantitative and qualitative research on old age in the future.

The subject sample was limited to women over age 65. Although women make up two-thirds of the U.S. population over age 65, they have been marginalized in the research on aging. There is a need for research on the experiences specific to women in this age category.

Although, as previously described, some attempt at sample diversity was made, no attempt was made to fully represent the general population in terms of ethnic, economic or racial diversity within the sample. In addition, as it turned out, all of the women in the study had received at least enough college credits for a degree and many had one or more advanced degrees.

As noted earlier, the participants as group were highly educated professional women; three have Ph.D. degrees, two have Master's degrees and all had at least enough credits to graduate college, even if they never finished a particular degree. Several were teachers and school administrators. It is understood that the occupational restraints of their generation limited women's choices and that future studies with this age population will most likely reflect this restricted choice. However, the nature of their professions might be seen as an advantage to them in that their skills and experience necessary and gleaned from

a lifetime in their professions could be adapted in old age, without too much physical hardship, to their current endeavors. Women who did not work outside the home or who worked in blue collar jobs may not be as easily able to find ways to adapt “to new ways of work” in old age that are not as physically taxing.

Although socioeconomic status was not verified in any way, educational status most probably positively affected socioeconomic status. The study did not attempt to fully represent the general population in this regard. Again because of the limited size of the sample due to the nature of the methodology, it was not considered advisable to try to represent an equitable balance in these areas. Rather, it was felt that attempts to do so would fragment the data.

In addition, although not free from health problems, nonetheless, the health problems they faced did not totally debilitate them. These women were, in fact, following life-long patterns and lifelong dreams. It was not that age allowed them a freedom to try something that they did not feel free to try before. Rather, it was more that life allowed them the longevity to attain a status in which they achieved the time and opportunity to do something they had been trained for and enjoyed all their lives. For the most part, the women knew their own skills and talents and had confidence based on previous experiences in life (even if those experiences did not directly match the skills and traits specifically needed for this particular pursuit) to forge ahead in an effort to make a difference in the lives of others.

As a group, the women in this study had the money and or opportunity given to them to pursue their present endeavors freed from the need to worry

about basic necessities such as food and shelter. Many old men and especially old women in our society live at or below poverty levels and the energy, resources or opportunity to pursue endeavors such as the women in the study find themselves in are not available to many. With poverty rates as high as 50% for African American and Latina women who live alone (Carstensen and Pasupathi, 1993), *financial security could certainly free one to pursue creative, productive endeavors that one might not be free to pursue if one's days are spent earning money for survival needs.*

CHAPTER IV

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

This narrative qualitative study was designed to examine the life stories of women leaders in old age. This chapter gives voice to the life experiences of the participants by documenting events, decisions and insights, as well as the familial or cultural context that led them to become leaders at an age that defies cultural stereotypes about old age. Their individual stories are presented here to introduce the women to the reader and to provide background for the themes that emerged from analysis of narrative of the data as a whole that will be presented in Chapter 5.

Basic demographic information about each of the women is presented in Table 1. The table is organized alphabetically. The table lists the date of birth of each of the participants along with the marital status at the time of the interview, the level of education achieved and the race/ethnicity of the participants. Pseudonyms were used as per the policy of the University of San Diego's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects and other names and identifying information was changed to protect confidentiality.

Table 2 presents a list of the activities pursued by each of the participants in her old age. Again, as per the policy of the University of San Diego's Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, the exact names of

organizations were changed to be generic (e.g. "professional association" was used rather than the name of the profession) in order to protect confidentiality. The table is limited to the activities most pertinent to the scope of the study, those that may pertain to a position of leadership at the local, district, state or national level. Most of the participants were also involved in other activities, many with their churches or social groups. A complete listing of activities and accomplishments throughout the lives of the participants would be prohibitively long and outside the scope of the study. Suffice it to say that these were active women throughout their lives.

Introduction to the Women's Stories

The stories are presented in random order. Individual, detailed stories are used to give the reader an appreciation of the backgrounds, the philosophies and the scope of activities of each of the women. They are not, as in some documentary stories or portraits, presented to elicit feelings of sympathy for the plight of the older woman in general or for any of these women in particular. They are not meant to evoke in the reader a belief that these women were somehow different than other women in the circumstances that led them to become leaders in old age. On the contrary, the stories show the reader that the women leaders in this study are, in fact, "ordinary" women who faced the same events, possibilities and challenges we all do and yet have persevered into old age and continued to take responsibility for themselves and for bettering their world, finding themselves as leaders in old age. The larger point is that old age, for these women and in the context of leadership, was truly an "un-event", as one of

the women put it, quite the opposite of what we stereotype it to be in terms of a marker for decline. The inspiration we attain from reading their stories comes not from the fact that the stories themselves are so moving, not because we read about them and cry "oh, how sad" or "oh, the poor women have had to go through such a horrible thing" but the fact that they are the best models for us to show that we can be leaders in our own old age precisely because they are so like us at any age. They show, by the fact that they are somehow not extraordinary or unusual, that old age is a time of leadership just like any other time and that, given the invitation and opportunities and passions of the person involved, age is not only not an obstacle but can be a time of greater opportunity if we but take advantage of it.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Year of birth	Marital status	Education	Race/ethnicity
Anne	1928	Married	Doctorate	Caucasian
Donna Key Hotay	1929	Married	Master's degree	Caucasian
Felicia	1917	Widow	Bachelor's degree	African American
Louise	1926	Married	Doctorate	Native American/ Caucasian
Mary Elizabeth	1918	Single	Doctorate	Caucasian
Muriel	1919	Divorced	Bachelor's degree	Caucasian
Quan Yin	1934	Divorced	Bachelor's degree	Caucasian
Ruby	1919	Divorced	Some college credits	African American
Sylvia	1920	Widow	Master's degree	Caucasian

Table 2

Partial List of Participants' Activities in Their Old Age

Participant	Activities
Anne	President, local Retired Professional Association; Past President, State Retired Professional Association; President, local Philanthropic Organization
Donna	Community Activist, Initiator and organizer of educational outreach program for nature preserve; Volunteer, Canyon Natural Park Nature Center; Chair, Canyon Advisory Committee
Felicia	Active leader in Senior Leadership Organization; First African American in a state organization that recommended legislation for seniors (served for over 10 years); Community activist; President of a state organization serving minorities and the aged; Advisory Board for organization working on issues of old age
Louise	Curator and board of directors of a historical museum; Assistant administrator of the Police Department Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP) in her area; Co-chair and Vice-Minister, Lector and Eucharist Minister at local churches; Past president of a county historical society; "Volunteer of the Year" for a National Night Out Against Crime; Political activist with efforts for police department
Mary Elizabeth	Assistant to university Vice President; Co-founder, Director of Public Relations, Orphanage and Children's Hospital
Muriel	Recipient, National Foundation Grant to create a art exhibit honoring women in history; Featured artist, Women's History Reclamation Project Participant artist, Crone Show II exhibit; Member, Old Lesbians Organizing Committee
Quan Yin	Senior Capital Campaign Director at a children's shelter; Political activist, initiator and organizer of campaign to fund processing of DNA kits for rape victims

Ruby	Member district senior commission; Teacher for 55 Alive Driving course for AARP; President of a community park/recreation organization; Treasurer of a senior leadership group; Named Local Hero of the Year by local bank and public radio; Volunteer for Police Department Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP)
------	---

Sylvia	Board Member (former chair), County Affirmative Action Advisory board; Member, City Advisory Planning Committee; Member, Friends of the City Library; Silver Medal Winner, Senior Olympics; Senator of a state organization that recommended legislation for seniors; Representative of another; Past president (three terms) at the state and local level of a national organization for older women; Presenter, conference on elder abuse; Member, Area Agency on Aging Advisory Council; Member, City Domestic Violence Prevention Commission; Published poet and freelance writer
--------	---

Louise

Louise was the first woman I called after the completion of the preliminary study nine months earlier. A friend who said that Louise had been nominated for entry into a Woman's Hall of Fame had referred her to me. I knew there would be much to learn about her and hoped there would be much to learn from her. As did most of the other women in the study, Louise had invited me to her home for the interview. When I arrived, she opened the door, and immediately gave me a hug. Not the Great Aunt Mary kind of hug where you feel squeezed and suffocated, but a delightful, warm and welcoming hug that made me feel comfortable and welcome. It spoke of her confidence and strength. And it put me immediately at ease about the interview.

We conducted the interview in a long, thin front room of her home, a room filled to the brim and then some. Bookshelves were completely packed with books and videotapes and both were overflowing into stacks on the floor. There wasn't a space in the room that wasn't filled with some kind of collection from dolls to stuffed animals to books to tapes. She even had a large collection of Disney movies in the videotape collection. The collections were piled up around us, filled even many of the spaces on the floor. There were dolls everywhere: on shelves, on the mantle piece, on tables, including over 35 Kewpie dolls, and a set of dolls dressed in a variety of Native American costumes. It turns out that Louise used dolls and fashion to teach. She spoke during the interview of another set of dolls with costumes she had made to represent women in San Diego's early history and which had been donated for display. The dolls and the period clothing

they were a three dimensional representation of history and therefore combined three of Louise's talents and passions: history, costume, and sewing. In fact, Louise taught with costume in other ways as well. As a history teacher she brought into her classes guests dressed in period costume to make the history come alive for her students.

She wore a gray turtleneck and her gray hair was braided in what she noted was her signature style with the braids pinned up on top and framing her face. Louise sat in a comfortable looking easy chair and I sat on a similar one next to it that she said was her husband's chair and on the arm of which she kept a small stuffed animal frog "to keep me company and to make me smile." Angel, her seven-year-old seal point cat (who has it's own website), meandered about as we talked.

Louise's interview took place when she was 75 years old. She is a well-educated woman with two Bachelor's degrees, a Master's degree, and a Ph.D. Ever the teacher, she put her age in perspective by telling me that she was born before the invention of radios and television and that she learned to read by the light of a kerosene lamp. In fact, she remembered the first radio she ever heard as well as her job keeping her grandmother's Victorola turning to keep the music playing while her grandmother crocheted and knitted.

As we began the interview, I explained to Louise, as I did to all the women in the study, that I would not turn on the tape recorder until I told them I was going to do so, that I wanted to explain to them what we were going to be doing in the interview and give them a chance to ask questions before we turned on the

tape. But Louise was ready to begin her stories even before the tape was turned on and began telling me about being born in an elevator on the way up to the delivery room. She explained that she couldn't wait, even then, to get started. She added with a smile, "Of course my pat line is my life has been full of ups and downs ever since."

Early in the interview Louise gave me a three page single space typed timeline of her life that she had completed as a part of a nomination form for inclusion in the city's first Women's Hall of Fame. Louise first received recognition for accomplishments when she was a child. The first honor she remembers receiving for her efforts was a silver dollar awarded to her when she was ten years old by the Women's Temperance Union for her essay on "The Evils of Alcohol." Since that time, she has accomplished much more and received numerous awards, culminating with her nomination, at age 75, for admittance to the Women's Hall of Fame to honor her long life of accomplishment.

There are themes that stood out in Louise's time line, themes that interplayed throughout her life, including her heritage, her knowledge of and talent in designing and sewing fashions, her desire for and love of education, and her determination to help others, and her ability to overcome adversity. Louise's Native American heritage had a major impact on her life. Her maternal grandmother was a Cherokee Indian and her paternal grandmother was French and Osage Indian. She spent the first thirteen years of her life living with her maternal grandparents and aunt, who was just eleven years her senior. From her

grandmother and aunt, who served as lifelong role models, she learned lessons that have stayed with her all these years. She described her aunt as “the epitome of perfection.”

Everything she did was precisely and almost perfectly done. She was the one who encouraged me and insisted that I could improve my grades and that if I could get a satisfactory, I most certainly could get an excellent.

She was the motivation behind my efforts to excel at whatever I did.

The years spent with her grandmother impacted her in other ways as well. Her grandmother filled Louise's days with stories of her own childhood spent in a log cabin on a reservation. Louise so loved the stories and was so intrigued with the story telling technique, that when she became a college teacher, she used story telling to teach and to maintain her students' interest.

I was fascinated by the way she was telling me how the world was when she was a little girl back in the mid-1800s. So when I became a teacher, it was only natural that I attempt to teach my students in the same manner. I was very fortunate because I had the highest re-enrollment of any instructor in the community college where I taught. And they wanted to come back because I would always tell them, “I will tell you more next time.” Like Shaherizad did.

Her story-telling ability held her in good stead in other ways as well. When she was asked to produce a historical fashion show for the 200th anniversary of the founding of San Diego, she recruited friends and family to appear in over one thousand presentations, known as Apparel America, 28 television appearances,

finally reaching over one million people. They presented history through the costumes and fashions of the day and amassed the largest private collection of historical fashion in the Western United States. Their presentations included stories, humor and skits. She smiled as she recalled her favorite skit, which was "all the bathing beauties on the beach chased by a Keystone Cop for indecent exposure because they would pull their bathing suits up to their knees!"

Her family's influence was apparent in other areas and other ways that Louise carried throughout her life. Besides story-telling, Louise's grandmother taught her to sew, providing the beginning of a lifelong love of fashion, both a career and an avocation, and an even greater philosophy of life about excelling in what she attempted.

She would thread my needle and say, "Now take tiny stitches." A few minutes later she would come back and say, "Is that the best that you can do? That's at least three threads off. Take it out and do it again." And over and over she would say, "You can do better than that, take it out and do it over." I have always been grateful that she showed me there is a better way to do it, and so of course my standards for my own production was definitely raised at that point. It was never "Oh, that'll do." If it's three threads out, I still take it out. And this is what I tried to instill in my students as I taught designing and tailoring. I wanted them to create something [about which] they would be happy to say, "I made this."

But the lessons learned from sewing were far-reaching in a more important way. "It taught me if you are determined enough you can accomplish anything." That can-do attitude pervaded her life. Throughout our interview, as events in her life were related and explained, Louise's stories were sprinkled with the phrase, "And I thought, 'I can do this.'" When she wanted to be a teacher, she thought, "I can do this." And when she wanted to enlist in the Navy to help the war effort during World War II, she thought, "I can do this" and borrowed her brother's birthday since she was only 16 years old. After the war, she became a Brownie Scout leader and then a Cub Scout Den mother, even though she had no children of her own.

I always wanted to be a mother and a couple of my friends had children the right age and, as every organization always, they were looking for volunteers to help. And I thought, "I can help, I can do this." And I did.

Some of the can-do spirit came of necessity. As the mother of six children with a husband who was constantly gone on military duty and later as a single mother for fifteen years, Louise "learned how to do things I never thought I would have to learn to do. I did plumbing, electrical wiring, repairing, painting, all the things that go into keeping a home running." When she bought a house next to hers, a friend taught her

how to cut and lay tile, how to install a water heater, how to wire from a breaker box into the circuits. Everything I did that the city came out and inspected, they couldn't believe that I was the one

who had done it and they would make me demonstrate how I did it.

They didn't believe that a little woman could do that. I guess I was more determined than ever to show them, "Oh, yes I could and I did!"

Louise has a history of meeting challenges head-on with confidence and faith. Her belief in herself was based on a solid belief that she was supported by God helped her survive the many challenges and obstacles in her life. She spoke of many times in her life when she and her children did not have money for food and no idea where their next meal would come from, only to have a friend or neighbor show up just in the nick of time with sewing work for her to do for them.

I can't think of anything that is an insurmountable challenge that we didn't figure a way either around it or right through it. We managed everything that came along. I think because I prayed for guidance, I think because I believed that it would come and it always did. So I have always taught my youngsters, God knows what you need and he knows when you need it and you just believe that and you work toward that and it will happen.

Louise was a survivor of challenges in more ways than one. At the age of 33, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer and underwent surgery and a series of radiation treatments. Five years later, her husband abandoned her and her six children. At the age of 69, she was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and given a series of radiation treatments and a short-time prognosis. However, six years later, at the time of her interview, she remained active and was

continuing to pursue her activities with the City Police Department, her church, her family, and counseling other cancer patients.

Whether because of her survival of cancer or because a positive attitude is inherent in her personality, there was a sense of gratitude about Louise, a positive philosophy about life. "I want people to realize they have the option of making it a beautiful day. Or they can choose to ignore the beauty that is offered and go their own way and complain. I don't ever complain. I am so delighted that I have another day."

Another of the themes of Louise's life is her willingness to help others. Although it was history, fashion and costume that brought her to the attention of the mayor, it was her willingness to help someone else that led her to establish Apparel America.

The mayor asked me if I would consider doing a couple of historical shows so we could introduce people to the past of San Diego, and I said, "Sure, no problem." Wow. The thing that changed my entire life was two words: I'll help.

Louise's desire to be of service to her community and others was life-long. She noted, "If someone came to me for help, I would find a way to do it. If something has to be done and nobody else volunteers to do it I'll show them how." Even in retirement, she continued to serve others. For example, at the time of our interview, after volunteering in her church for over 40 years, she was the vice minister for the Third Order of St. Francis. Louise spoke of St. Francis'

brothers “who had no money and yet they worked for anyone who needed help and that is kind of what I built my life on since 1957.”

In fact, it was her willingness to help and her devotion to serving others that led to her latest leadership endeavor, begun in her old age. Louise had had other plans for her retirement but a friend asked for her help in working with a law enforcement volunteer force.

I thought, “I am going to write when I retire and I am going to re-read all of my favorite books.” [But my friend] said, “Oh come on! You would really enjoy it.” I have never regretted that she talked me into it.

That beginning led from one activity with the police department to another, with more and more responsibility. She began as a volunteer for the Police Department through Volunteers in Policing (VIP), the Retired Senior Volunteers for the Police (RSVP), National Night Out Against Crime, and more. Her living room is now filled with stuffed animals for a law enforcement program that gives them to children. These efforts led to yet another leadership opportunity. For the past two years, Louise has been on the board of directors and helped found and then served as the curator of a law enforcement historical museum.

Louise continued to face severe medical problems. Months after our initial interview, we were in contact with one another discussing her story. She had just returned from her fourth heart catheterization. The doctors had told her to go home and “keep beating the odds.” In spite of these challenges, Louise continues to help others. In fact, her call to me

was, in part, to add information about her education that she thought would be inspirational to other women. She wanted me to be sure to add that she had not begun her post-high school education until her children were grown and had then spent the next thirteen years acquiring her four degrees. It was important for her to pass on so that other women would know “they don’t have to be 18 to be college freshmen. They can be 42.”

Louise has remained active and involved, as if grateful for each day and on a mission to make every day count.

I still love watching a sunrise over a mountain. I love watching the sun set over the sea. Every day is a whole new revelation. I wouldn’t trade places with anybody in this whole world. I am perfectly content being who I am because I am who I wanted to be. I am a 75 year old great-grandmother who loves her family very dearly, her community almost as much. Who is very active, involved in people, things, issues. Who wants to leave the world a better place than she found it. I’m impatient to get on with the next thing.

She had certainly accomplished her goal and I wondered with awe what her “next thing” will be. Old age was not a resting place for her. She continued, moving through any limitations that her health challenges put in front of her. It was not that she was in denial of certain limitations of old age. Rather, she kept going in spite of them.

Old age does become a challenge when you can't walk as quickly or as steadily. I'm limited physically in that I can't run and I have always run. You never walk if you can run, you know. You never run if you can fly!

Felicia

Felicia, age 85, was referred to me by a friend who listed for me many of Felicia's accomplishments in the last 20 years. In her old age, among other things, Felicia was the first African American woman in a state legislative body for seniors where she served for over 10 years and was instrumental in the passage of a bill that helped seniors purchase eye glasses and dentures with a minimum loan. She is a staunch community activist who has also actively served in her old age on a district level commission for seniors, a state level organization for minorities and aging, advisory boards, and is even now active in an women's organization that provides scholarships. She has also found time to travel abroad and serve as an elder for her church.

So it was no surprise to me that Felicia asked me to come to her for the interview. I assumed that she was a busy woman and my traveling to her instead of vice versa would save her time. What was a surprise was the discovery when I arrived at the address she had given me was that she resided in an assisted living facility. When I knocked on her door, there was no answer. I looked around in the activity rooms inhabited by small groups of old women watching television or reading. Two young women in medical uniforms were sitting with these women. I asked where I might find Felicia and was told that she had gone to

have her hair styled but that one of the young women would call her for me.

Seconds later, the woman who had made the call for me looked out the window and smiled at Felicia roaring down the path to her room. I say "roaring" because Felicia was riding on a motorized seated scooter that was racing towards us and screeched to a halt just in front of us, barely missing another woman. Felicia was definitely a woman on the move.

We went into her large private room. It was not like any rooms in assisted living facilities that I had ever been visited. The large brass bed was dwarfed by the space around it. A turquoise lazy boy recliner and nightstand stood next to it. Opposite the bed were two sitting chairs, a television, and a large wooden china display cabinet filled with hand-painted floral designed porcelain plates and other pieces, all painted by her mother. The room was adorned with family pictures and on one wall hung a display of looked like inked drawings of African American women's faces. A collection of sequined and gold lame baseball-style hats hung on a hat rack. It was a wonderful room deeply reflective of the personality and the heritage of its inhabitant.

Felicia wore a white T-shirt adorned with gold and silver studs. Around her neck hung a large cross on a necklace chain. Felicia sat in her scooter during our interview and I in a chair in front of her. I had the feeling throughout the interview that this set-up was a metaphor for our positions: she was ready to go at a moment's notice and held the break-neck speed all her life and, compared to her, I was sitting still.

Throughout the interviews I conducted for this dissertation, it was interesting for me to note the amount of detail that each participant provided about her childhood and early life experiences. Although I began each interview asking the women to give me a timeline of her life and its highlights, some spoke at great detail about their childhoods while others mentioned few, any details, about their lives prior to adulthood. Felicia made only two references to her childhood.

Born in 1917, Felicia was the youngest of six children. Her response to the timeline question was to speak at length, not about herself, but about her siblings and *their* accomplishments. She related little of her own childhood other than to mention two events, a trip with her sister and her father's death. At age ten, like all her siblings and all her nieces and nephews throughout the years, she was treated by her sister to a trip to Washington, DC. She recalled that this trip was her sister's way to instill in them pride in their history and their heritage. Her father's sudden death two days before her ninth birthday had a profound affect on her life, not just because of the loss itself but also because of the impact of his death on the family. She recalled that because of her young age at the time of his death, most of her memories of her father come from the "borrowed" memories of her siblings. She did remember him as a man who was proud of his family and who expected them to be achievers. "We were a family who believed in education and in upward mobility."

When her father died, Felicia's mother, whom she described as having a "very very strong personality," called all the children together to help them

understand his death and the implications it would have on the family. One of the expectations of the family both before and after her father's death was that the children would go to college and that each sibling would help the others. So when she graduated from high school, Felicia enrolled in and subsequently graduated from West Virginia University. She noted, "I never thought I would *not* go to college. It was later that I realized the kinds of sacrifices that were being made for me." (Felicia came by her values not just from her parents but also from her maternal grandparents, both of whom were slaves. "I can remember grandpa telling us how he felt about being involved in the politics around there. His childhood experiences had helped him realize the importance of being involved.")

On entering college, Felicia had planned on becoming a teacher, one of the few career choices available to women at that time. However, because of the Depression, school systems were not hiring so she took a job with the Selective Service. It was through this job that she met her husband. Their life together was a product of the time and the impact of their race. Her husband served in the military in a segregated unit, as were all military units at the time. After his service obligations were complete, he took a job at the Post Office. Felicia pointed out that

the post office was the mainstay for many Black families because if they get a job with very decent pay, they can support their families. But they created a high degree of Black males who were better educated, over-educated for those positions. He was one of them.

But like her parents before her, Felicia and her husband were "ambitious for our two children." Both sons became professionals. She pointed out with pride that her youngest is a surgeon and is now serving as the chief administrative officer for a large military hospital.

Following her job with the Selective Service, Felicia worked as a social worker and ended up supervising male caseworkers in the foster care system. When asked if it were unusual for a woman to supervise men in those days, she replied, "It wasn't normal!" In reflecting on how it happened that she found herself in that career position, she noted, "I never have gone out and competed with somebody for a job. Somebody's always come and asked me to work for them."

Felicia made things happen in a big way, and she had an impact on the lives of many whom she helped, partly because she was not afraid to think big. When one of the boys in the system ran into some difficulty in the south that she thought would be difficult for him, she called her sister and arranged for Robert Kennedy, who was Attorney General at the time, to intervene. "That job was a highlight for me. Every four or five years I run into someone who will tell me that he still remembers me after all these years."

Following her husband's sudden death when she was in her fifties, Felicia moved from the Midwest to California. A year later, however, she was asked to take a job at a Lutheran church in New York where she relocated and stayed for ten years, evaluating economic programs to help Blacks. It was a job of which she feels great pride.

This was back in the days when there was a lot of concern about the disadvantages Blacks were experiencing and there were some groups that were trying to do certain things to help the crowd. ... I feel like I made a good contribution during those days. The program, as far as I know, is still alive and well.

In her mid sixties, while still living on the east coast, Felicia was involved in an automobile accident. Up to that point in her life, Felicia had maintained a fierce independence and had purposely not taken jobs close to her sons who lived in California because "I didn't want them to take on the responsibilities for me even though I was getting old." However, Felicia suffered a head injury in the accident and although she did not feel her injuries were as bad as they were, her sons contacted her doctor who convinced her to go to California where they could care for her. "So I came to California never believing I would end up living here."

During her recuperation from the accident, Felicia was asked to work for a program helping people understand community systems and how to use them. She held formal classes for mostly Black retirees to help them find and take advantage of community resources available to them.

These are people who would work hard but stay within a certain niche because society had made that niche seem the proper place to be. So it was my interest in helping them look at the broader picture and begin to discover how they could better use it. So that was what I did until I "retired."

When asked how old she was when she retired, Felicia admits, "I'm not sure because I never really retired." Instead, she worked tirelessly through her old age, for over 20 years, in a series of advocacy systems. She was instrumental in the founding of a state level legislative body for seniors, in which she served over 10. The program was designed to encourage seniors to participate in the political process. Felicia's family-instilled values of participation, as well as her lifelong efforts to help African Americans and get them involved in their communities, prepared her to be at the forefront of this program. She told the story of her initial involvement:

A young woman was conducting this meeting and she was pointing out the program wanted to be sure that representation came from the various segments of the population who were seniors. They were very specific [that] some of these people would have to be females. And she had gotten some names of some persons who may be good candidates and the names included Hispanic sounding names and so forth. When the time came for questions, I raised my hand and I said, "I didn't hear anything about Blacks." So she said, "You're right, we don't have sufficient Blacks to have made a category of Blacks." So I said, "I'm interested, I'm female and I'm Black." ... I intended to embarrass her. Very few Blacks at that time lived in the area and I could understand where she was coming from but I felt she needed to be reminded. And so when it came time to make the selection, I was selected.

Felicia was proud of her involvement with this program. "It is still in existence and I feel honored. We were responsible for pushing the legislation on some things that are [now] taken for granted." Her pride in her past accomplishments was tempered, however, by her humility. When asked how she would describe herself, Felicia spoke about the satisfaction she received from feeling that she has contributed to benefit others. Also in keeping with her longstanding values, she noted that she "gets a lot of satisfaction out of contact with persons who are achieving."

Her activism was also a form of maintaining her independence. She had a positive outlook on her life and "a certain self-confidence that I could handle it." She has overcome obstacles that she said included prejudices about her race and gender and the assumptions that people have made and continue to make about both. Those assumptions and the resulting biases continued to frustrate her.

At times you run onto people who assume that because you are Black or because you are female, you don't have the ability to assess certain things. Now and then now and then I would have an experience that would suggest the individual who was trying to impose upon me was limited in their capabilities to understand the background and the history of this Black woman. It still sets up a series of questions for me as to why, after all these years [they] have not understood that there are ways in which [they] see me and it's really a disadvantage for [them] to assume certain things.

At my age and in these times, I still reflect and have a form of amazement that [they] have learned so little.

While she has faced these assumptions all her life about her race and gender, she has found that she now faced additional prejudices with respect to her age. Even her own children are not immune from her efforts to counterbalance these assumptions. When her sons asked her to let them take over some of her worries, she replied, "Nooo! You don't get control. No way!" She explained her reaction by telling me that, "I have a deep appreciation for my two sons and the caring ways in which they demonstrate they want to take care of me but ... I feel that I will be less of a person if I capitulate."

Muriel¹²

Muriel is an artist. Her work, along with other older women artists, was featured in 2002 in a museum exhibit titled "Crone Show II". A newspaper article Muriel shared with me about the exhibit explained, "With this exhibit, young people can begin to see and understand their connections to generations past and to glimpse their own futures" (*San Diego Union Tribune*, August 4, 2001). Part of Muriel's contribution to the exhibit, deemed the "Skyweaving canopy", was not just a metaphorical connection but one that offered a literal connection as well. Muriel weaved yarn of rainbow colors at the top of the canopy while the children who visited the exhibit weaved at the bottom, so that the meeting at the middle was a literal connection of art and generations. The Crone Show II

¹² Because Muriel so graciously read into the transcript of her interview the poem she had written about her son's death in the September 11, 2001 attack on the Pentagon, it was felt that due credit could only be given by including her real name (Muriel Fisher), which is done here with her permission.

presented “the old woman as powerful, vital, and involved in her own life and projects, a complete person in her own right.” (*San Diego Union Tribune*, August 4, 2001).

The first time I called Muriel, to introduce myself and see if she would be interested in participating in an interview, she was not home so I was greeted by her lively and upbeat answering machine message: “Muriel’s not here but you are there. She’ll call you back. Just tell her where!” This message was an expression of her humor and attested to the fact that this 83 year-old woman had either retained or found a sense of playfulness and joy in her old age.

We met in Muriel’s apartment. Because she had been robbed recently, Muriel was in the process of moving to another apartment in which she might feel safer. Because of the impending move, she apologized for her present home being “in sixes and sevens.” Having never been there before, it was difficult to tell what was normal and what was part of the move process, but I found the apartment a wonderful montage of textures and colors, not unlike an art museum itself. We sat in the living room of the apartment, on the couch across from the overstuffed easy chair in the corner from which she produced her many artistic creations. The couch, although roomy enough for me to sit comfortably, was cluttered with papers and books.

The walls were adorned with a variety of modalities of art including paintings, framed photographic, a wooden sculpted mirror, a Native American dream catcher, and a small hooked-yarn picture. That picture was a piece of her heritage and represented the roots of her artistic creativity. It had been produced

by her father, who made hooked yarn creations until he was 92 and about whom she smiles when she refers to him as “my Pa the hooker.”

There were bookshelves on both sides of the room added to the mix. One was filled with books. On the other were stored her dolls in various stages of completion. An array of multiple colors of yarns and fabrics were draped over a small work shelf. Even Muriel’s clothing was a collage of color and texture. Her jacket was made in a crazy quilt design with dazzling jewel tones that set off the clip on her shoulder length straight gray hair.

Muriel began the interview by talking about her birth in Brooklyn, New York in 1919 and the fact that her family moved when she was five to a suburb on Long Island. She described her mother as a strong matriarch who “really should have had the opportunity to be either a business woman or a leader. But those were different times.” Her father owned a business manufacturing sample cards for textile mills. This business would play a major part in Muriel’s life as an inspiration for her creative use of fabric in her art as an adult. “That’s how I [got] the affinity toward or the at-homeness of being with fibers.” But in her childhood, Muriel was more athletic and active in outside activities including camping, serving as a junior lifeguard and playing ball. She soon became involved with the theater that surrounded her in her community and school and she went to college majoring in speech, theater, drama, public speaking. It was in college that she met her husband, a musician whose service in the military sent them to various “adventures” living in Texas, Mississippi and Florida.

Living in the South as a young Jewish woman, a self-described “damn Yankee,” and a non-commissioned officer’s wife, she faced discrimination on all sides. She described the time a neighbor complained about “Jewish smells” coming from her cooking, although the cooking that was being done at the time was corn beef and cabbage another officer’s wife was teaching her to cook. Another time, she was told the bus she was on would not move unless she took her “proper place.” It was during one of those episodes that Muriel determined that “no way was my child, with whom I was pregnant, going to be born in the South. I went straight back to New York and that is where he was born.”

When her husband was deployed overseas, Muriel and her children moved to Los Angeles to live with her mother-in-law. It was in Los Angeles where Muriel began her leadership activities, initially to be of service to the educational needs of her children. At the time she was instrumental in the beginning of a progressive school for her children. She noted with pride that the school was quite successful and that her son had still kept in contact with classmates, some 30 years later. This would prove comforting to Muriel at the time of her son’s death at the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, when many of the graduates of the school sent her expressions of loss and sympathy.

When Muriel’s husband returned from overseas, the couple bought their first home. Her father, still working in his sample card business, would send “little treasure chests” filled with material. But although she had no interest in sewing and no use for the fabric herself, other mothers in the neighborhood bought the fabric from her.

It sort of grew into a business and I was always very cavalier about it and very casual. If I were home I would chat and take care of them in garage, measure something and charge a little something. It eventually grew. When my neighbors complained about all the cars coming and going at that cul-de-sac, we found a little shop in a barn. I was the barn lady. Then I would travel back to New York and bring stuff. We would sell odds and ends and it was a business for many years and my brother joined it when he was finished with USC.

Muriel has also helped found or been in on the beginnings of many organizations and activities that have continued to help others long after her participation has ended. Over 27 years ago, she was involved with the original Renaissance Faire that has been an annual southern California event ever since. Prior to that, she helped found an arts and craft coop, which is also still in existence today. She and her friends started an art show that was the precursor to a now large art festival in Yellowstone Park and she was involved in the formation of several art and theater groups.

Muriel's outlook on life is very much grounded in her art and creativity. She recalled an incident about three decades ago when she had gone to Mexico and had found an old bed spring that she used parts of, "weaving and wrapping and coiling with whatever materials I had." She proceeded to drive home with the creation wobbling atop her car when she was stopped at the US/Mexican border.

They sent me to secondary immediately and the guy takes one look and says, "Is this art?" I said, 'Well it better be. Or I am in the wrong business." It sold and the more I went with this zany approach to life and, and my work and my interaction with people, the further I became "the me" that I am at 83.

After 31 years of marriage and raising four children, Muriel and her husband parted. Muriel went to live with a woman friend and lover who had shared her home when she was married. They lived for a time in Ensenada, Mexico and returned to the US to live in San Diego where Muriel became active in the lesbian community. For many years, Muriel played a leadership role in the local lesbian community, especially in the area of the arts. For example, going back to her roots in local theater as a child and young adult, she was an active participant in local lesbian theater productions. During her activities with the lesbian and art communities, she tried "to get a few of the together" and formed a group called SOL (Slightly Old Lesbians). The group never really got off the ground because "one woman didn't like the word lesbian and another didn't like the word old, and the other one was objecting to slightly. We never did very much." But soon after that, another group was formed that included activities for older women. Muriel was at the original meetings of that group and stayed for twelve years, even chairing the group for a time. But that group "never moved far enough in social action and liberality and activism. It always remained for the most part on a very shallow, social level and

that was never my choice." So Muriel left, still searching for a forum in which to express her desire to be of active service to her community.

When she became aware of a group called OLOC (Older Lesbians Organizing Committee) she jumped in wholeheartedly, meeting with the group for an entire year to plan a conference for older lesbians, "and particularly taking up the whole issue of ageism." It was during her involvement with OLOC that she met Barbara McDonald (*Look me in the eye*, 1991), the keynote speaker for the conference, and Barbara's partner and co-author, Cynthia Rich. Both women would later be immortalized in the form of fiber art dolls for one of Muriel's more recent art exhibits, a collection of dolls she made representing several women in history. OLOC became a national organization (Old Lesbians Organizing for Change) with which Muriel has stayed actively engaged.

In addition, at the time of our interview, Muriel was actively participating in Women of Ancient Wisdom, a crone group of about 40 to 60 women who meet once a month. It was at those group meeting that she got her inspiration from peers.

One evening they [talked] about their passions and ... their interests and my eyes opened and my mouth just dropped open. It was so exciting to me to see this many mature women, ... independent, strong, full of vitality and activity and various interests and causes. It was to me a blessing.

Though a role model for others, these crone groups were Muriel's role models at that time in her life. Other role models she cited were her parents who

she said influenced her creativity and provided her opportunities (e.g., camps, world travel) that “make for a strong, meaningful person.” While she may have begun her artistic and creative life with her parents, she credited her first lover, “a strong, charismatic individual” with whom she lived for 20 years, with recognizing and encouraging her growth as an artist. Her praises of her parents’ and lover’s influence on her life were, in part, an answer to how she might describe herself. She answered in terms of her roles and the affects of others on her life. When pushed to give credit to her own role in her life and use adjectives to describe herself, she started again in the same manner. “I have had an interesting life so it reflects.” But she was able to continue, “I am bright, I am friendly. I’m valuable. I was a good wife, but always an independent free spirit and never very, very serious at the role. I was always a progressive thinker and a liberal.” I noted the past tenses and asked if she would have described herself differently 20 years ago. She replied, “I would say this is the peak of my life. I feel fulfilled, I feel nurtured, I feel supported, I feel lucky.” In a reference either or both to her medical problems with her heart or to her deep grief over the loss of her son or both, she added, “I wish my heart felt the same way.”

When asked about obstacles she has faced in her life, Muriel did not mention the prejudices she has overcome, her more recently acquired heart condition or her losses of loved ones. Her response showed the value she put on activism and open-mindedness. The only obstacle she specifically named was

the narrowness of this particular lesbian community that I was active with. They wouldn’t pick a cause. And the ones who the ones who

were more knowledgeable and more serious and more erudite and more well-read have died. I am really a fossil. So, I feel it is very important doing the work that I do now.

Muriel's work is an extension of her life and the values she holds dear. Self-described as a fiber artist, Muriel uses her art as an expression of to teach, to inspire, to build bridges. Her art has evolved with her. Her most recent exhibit, "Homage to Exceptional Women in the Arts," came about as a result of a grant she received that allowed her to find a teacher, do research and pay for more materials. With this work, Muriel has created a new art form that also teaches and enlightens those who view it. Another article featuring Muriel noted that her work embodied her feelings about feminism, lesbian rights, freedom, and her 81 years of life experience. Her fiber art dolls have been shown at a local museum and she has plans for more doll creations. "People give me stuff, their junk and I make stuff with it. I'm a recycler. People ask me, 'Do you make a living doing this?' 'No,' I answer, 'I make a life.'"

Muriel said she didn't want to be a role model herself but appears to be resigned to it.

I think some of my independence is hard-fought and well-deserved and it's there to be shared and if I have to be a role model, I'll be a role model. It gets kind of tiresome and boring to hear that again and again, but since I get it from all sides there has got to be some truth in it.

Muriel noted that it is her desire to inspire creativity in others who have not tried or achieved in the past so they keep after their dreams and not give up on them. Sounds like a role model to me.

Addendum to Muriel's story

Muriel had much to say during our interview but even before the interview began, woven throughout, and after the interview was over, she shared memories and family photos of her son, including his decades-old wedding album. Our meeting was just four months following her son's death in the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the Pentagon. She had written a poem at the time of her son's death, as a way of expressing her grief. She had recently written a second poem, which she read for me during our interview. I consider her sharing of the poem and especially the reading of it into my tape recorder, knowing it would be part of the transcript, as quite a gift and an expression of her willingness to be open and vulnerable for the sake of helping others to understand. Indeed, it is another manifestation of the fact that, contrary to her desires otherwise, she continues to be a role model for so many.

The poems are both the outpouring of a mother's grief and a testament to her strength. I am deeply moved that she shared them with me and gratefully allowed me to place them here in this text.

An old adage reads: "No reason nor rhyme

But tell me god: was it his time?"

Why that meeting, that morning,

That room?
Of all the buildings in Washington
To meet his doom
At the Pentagon
Consulting with three star General Maud,
Proposing a plan they now applaud?
When that plane struck was
He listening or talking?
Why couldn't he had finished
And begun walking away
To his car, far, far, from
The horror of that cruel end?
When, when will it ever mend?

The following poem was written just days prior to our interview:

Facing the days as they come
No longer questioning why
Struggling through life 101
As the empty hours pass by
I fill them with stitching, reading,
Pretending at times it's not true.
I mourn your horrific passing,
Still hoping for a meaningful clue.

I spoke to Muriel several months after the interview. After years of living in apartments, being robbed and fearing for her safety, she had moved to a safe neighborhood into a new home purchased with funds she received from the government and the Red Cross following her son's death. She described her home as a castle and stated with a mixture of both pride and sadness, "It is my son's legacy to me."

Anne

Anne was the first participant I interviewed for the study. She was referred to me by a friend who spoke of her gregariousness, her graciousness and her generosity. My friend had also told me that Anne held a Ph.D. and was quite accomplished academically and personally. When I called Anne to tell her about the study and to ask if she would be interested in participating, she was personable and friendly but before she agreed to be a participant, she asked me to write her an email describing the study, what I was looking for and what I wanted to do and then to call her back. I was a bit taken aback that my verbal description had not been sufficient for her but the exercise of writing what she had asked me for helped coagulate the words in a concise form in a way I had not done previously. This was not just for a class or for my dissertation committee anymore.

In addition, she wanted the information from me organized and in writing. This too fit patterns revealed in her interview. Not only was she herself organized and thoughtful about what she undertook, she was an avid reader who actively sought and took in information through the written word. It was from

books and written information that she made decisions and plans for her life. Her task for me was a kick-start into the research. Here was my first participant being my teacher. Consciously or not, she was teaching me how to go about my research. As it turned out, she had a knack for organizing and teaching that followed her throughout her life activities both in work and in retirement but that began in her childhood.

Anne's career in education, as a teacher and a principal, was foreshadowed by her activities as a young girl. The middle child of nine siblings, Anne was always surrounded by children from her own family and others, for whom she was entrusted with responsibility even at a very young age.

Parents entrusted me to their kids for the Saturday movie or something like that and I was only about nine or ten years old. I was ... like a Pied Piper in the neighborhood to the Saturday show. I was trustworthy and responsible. My sister says, "How come you were always the teacher during the summer?" And I said, "Well, I was always had the paper and the pencils and was more organized than anybody." I was ready to go. Even in the summer programs when we were little, I had these kids competing and we won.

Anne's leadership skills continued into her teens and early twenties when she served as a Girl Scout leader. At the age of 20, she led the largest troop in her area. She remembered with pride, "And then when I became 21, I became the leader of leaders of all these older women who were Girl Scout leaders. That was quite a thing for 21."

As with many women in Anne's generation, a professional career was not considered a usual option. She stated, "I never thought about that because you *accepted* your role in life, which was you married and had children and that was it." However, it was at that time that Anne met her future husband, Art. It was Art who inspired her to go to college, pointing out that, in effect, she had been teaching her whole life and might enjoy pursuing teaching as a profession. Anne spent the next 20 years taking college classes and both she and Art received their Ph.D.'s at the same time.

Anne's career in education, which culminated in her role as a principal, was filled with innovation and leadership.

When I was a principal, when they mentioned ... that they were going to try something ten years down the line, I'd get started on it right away. Way back when they first started to introduce computers, I had time [designated] for my whole staff, even the custodians in the school. Everybody had to take something in computers. And that came from my reading about what is the future school going to be like.

When Anne neared retirement, the same forward thinking that characterized her career served her in her personal life as well. A full ten years prior to her planned retirement, Art and Anne, both life-long learners, began to read and take classes to learn how to best manage this new phase of their lives. She recalled, "My husband and I would take these classes about health

insurance, what it is that you would do with your time, and general financial kinds of things. We planned way ahead.”

Anne’s creativity and planning skills were just two of the lifelong traits she brought to her leadership endeavors in old age. At the time of our interview, at age 73, she was the soon-to-be outgoing president of a state-wide association of retired professionals in her field. Although Anne had served as president of various organizations on a local level, she reported that she had had no intention of serving as president of the 50,000 member organization.

I was not thinking of becoming the president of the state organization. I was helping *my mentor* become president, by trying new and different things that they had never done at the state level. Like really running it like a national election with the pictures [of candidates on placards]. I was doing crazy things. I was, in a sense, disruptive to them but I think it was creative to do something different, to add a little spice to the convention floor, which was always boring.

When Anne was elected president, after her mentor’s term of office expired, she brought her lifelong leadership skills and innovation with her and developed new programs that helped her organization’s members grow and develop professionally.

When I was President-Elect, I did something that they never do. They *still* haven’t done it because they don’t know how to do it. I did leadership workshops [for teachers]. Traveled all over the state for two years.

Not only had she taken up this leadership role, Anne also served as president of other organizations to which she belonged as well. In addition, she had begun work to build a coalition for a state scholarship foundation. (A year after our initial interview, Anne sent me an update on her activities. She was still president of her local professional organization, still active in others, and still “fighting for” the foundation. Her efforts were paying off. Her group had just been asked to work together with other state leaders to build a foundation they could all support.)

Anne’s love of people and her ability to meet and communicate with others in a positive way served her well in her leadership roles. She admitted as one of her skills her ability “to get committees to operate and to do whatever they are supposed to do.” She did this by meeting with them and using her many people skills to build coalitions.

I’d have them at my home for a special dinner or something – just talking. I think people like that. People like to know that the president is interested. And I’m the kind of person, you do something nice, I’m a note writer. I always pride myself in saying, ‘I really appreciate what you’re doing.’ And that helps a lot. But I think it’s just meeting with people and letting them talk.

While Anne did have a positive attitude about people and pointed out that she kept her arguments and tactics positive, that did not imply that she was afraid of conflict or of taking action for what she believed in.

I'm not afraid of taking risks. I do and I get myself into trouble, but that's okay. Like when I became president of my organization. We're the only area that's had two state leaders. Both women. The men hate our guts. They've singled out all the smart women. One by one, they have picked us off. So, you know what we're doing? We're going back into our divisions and we're becoming presidents of the local organizations and then we're going to the convention as a group. And the group is getting larger and larger. They're gonna have *trouble* with us!

Anne used her creative approach to problem solving in her personal life as well. Having suffered from a fire that destroyed her home, Anne eagerly anticipated rebuilding her home, filled with her creative ideas for each room. And true to her pattern, she enthusiastically approached the task with the help of books. She kept a stack of interior decoration and design books on her dining room table. During her interview, she pointed excitedly to the books. "I want to be doing the creative stuff right there. I'm planning my house room by room. I have a file folder of ideas for each room. For the first time in my life, I get to plan [how the house will be built] and it's *thrilling*."

This sense of enthusiasm about having control of her life has not been hampered by her old age. In fact, just the opposite appeared to be the case. Anne described her old age as a time of freedom in that she felt she had choices she did not feel were available to her in her earlier years. "[Y]ou feel for the first time that you can get things done that *you* want to. *You* are in control and it really

gets back to, 'Well how best can I spend *my* time? What is that *I'm* going to do? What is it that I *like* to do?' And then go ahead and do it!" Anne shook her head and smiled as she noted, "I don't even think of how old I am. No, seriously, unless somebody says, 'How old are you anyway?' [Old age] has been an un-event."

True to her life pattern, Anne handled old age with a sense of enthusiasm and planning for continued productivity. Rather than seeing age as an obstacle, Anne looked instead to the future and the actions necessary to make the future a good and vital time of life. She noted,

I did give one speech about age and how we are getting older and the quality is better if we take good care of ourselves. I always tell them, "Get involved in organizations and stimulate that brain because if you don't you're going to lose it." It's important you have a wholesome day and you'll live longer if you stimulate the brain cells.

It is the consistency of Anne's character, enthusiasm and care for others that she brought with her to her endeavors in old age. And it is the patterns of a lifetime that gave her and those whom she served in her role as president of her organizations the benefit of her positive, outgoing nature and creative mind. For Anne, old age is not an obstacle but an exciting continuation of a lifetime adventure. She stated with strong conviction, "I am what I am and when you go into retirement, you are what you are. You don't, all of a sudden, become a whole

new person. You do *not*. I'm very much the same little kid that I was when I was ten."

Mary Elizabeth

When I began to tell people about the research I wanted to do with women leaders in old age, at least four people referred me to Mary Elizabeth. She had quite a reputation both at the university where she worked as well as throughout the Catholic community in the city where she lived. I had no idea what to expect from the 80 year-old nun who was described by those who referred me to her as both "soft-spoken and gentle" and "a dynamo." When I met her she was wearing a blue pinstriped suit identical to one I own. I felt an immediate affinity to her.

The conference room where we were going to meet was occupied so we ended up conducting our interview sitting next to one another on a couch in the entry foyer of the university building in which she continued to work six months of the year. She was quite concerned about my comfort and about whether the content of her interview was what I needed. Throughout the interview, she continued to ask if she was providing the "right" information for my study. She spoke in a soft voice that was, at times, hard to hear, especially when people walked through the foyer. She did not appear to be self-conscious. In fact, apparently I felt more self-conscious about conducting our business in so public a place than she did about sharing her life story with me while people walked through the room. Her interest was in making me comfortable and in telling me about the children with whom she worked in the six months she was not at the university.

Although we had never met, she gently called me “sweetie” from the start. Her soft-spoken manner projected an almost fragile nature but her inner strength and vitality became apparent when she described her work at the university and most especially when she described her work the other six months of the year, which she spends helping to run an orphanage and public hospital she helped found for poverty-stricken children in the Caribbean. Much of her attention during the interview was deflected from herself and onto the conditions she worked so hard to ameliorate for the children. As she spoke of the children, her eyes focused as if looking far away and visualizing the babies she holds and prays for in the hospital and orphanage. She described, with an even softer voice than before, the conditions in which the children come to her – sick, often maggot-infested and abandoned. But her eyes lit up and her face broke into a smile as she told of success stories, of children placed in homes, of babies saved and health restored.

Mary Elizabeth’s work in the Caribbean represented a full circle back to her childhood dream of being a missionary, a dream inspired by a childhood spent among the nuns and priests in her Catholic neighborhood. She reminisced,

I grew up in a Catholic family with three children, [me], a sister who became a nun in my order, and a brother who is now a Jesuit priest. My Irish mother was a very fine Catholic so, in our house, God was just like part of the family. And then [a lot of] the books we had around the Catholic schools had to do with Saints lives who were missionaries.

With this background, it is no surprise that, at age 19, Mary Elizabeth entered the convent. Almost immediately upon becoming a nun, Mary Elizabeth, “always enamored of being a missionary,” offered to go to Africa but was turned down. She laughed as she explained, “They told me they wanted ‘tried virtue’ but I guess I hadn’t been tried enough.”

She was instead assigned to the field of education in which she remained for the next 36 years, serving as teacher and later as a school principal. She was also given the task of opening new schools, including boarding schools, with responsibilities ranging from purchasing buildings to day-to-day administration. She enjoyed her teaching and her work with the children. In reminiscing, she noted, “I did love my years running schools and, helping to raise children really ... [and] just making a child’s life happier.”

When she was principal of a boarding school, she met Zoey, a young student with whom she began a lifelong friendship. Mary Elizabeth and Zoey loved reading and enjoyed discussing books they read together. Although originally a cloistered nun, once the cloister was lifted by Vatican II, Mary Elizabeth accepted Zoey’s invitations to her home in Arizona for Thanksgiving dinner, a tradition that has continued to this day. In fact, Zoey’s children think of Mary Elizabeth as their grandmother.

It was through Zoey that Mary Elizabeth was to meet Father Luke, the person with whom she would begin her endeavors for the orphanage. At the time they met, Mary Elizabeth was enjoying her job at a university and not looking to do anything else. But, although she claimed she “didn’t seriously continue

thinking about missions," she admitted that throughout her career she had continued to offer to serve as a missionary. She recalled,

I really enjoyed teaching and running schools. I really, really enjoyed that. [But] whenever there was an opportunity to offer [to do missionary work] I did but I guess they didn't think I was capable for what they needed. It was just kind of a childhood dream, you know?

Although Mary Elizabeth continued to offer to be a missionary, she initially resisted when the opportunity presented itself. Father Luke, who had been told by Zoey of Mary Elizabeth's experience opening schools, contacted her about his ideas to open an orphanage in Honduras and pursued her for months to try to convince her to help him.

All he did was talk about Honduras. I don't know Spanish and to tell you the honest truth, I wasn't sure where Honduras was. He pursued me every two or three weeks. And he wanted me to meet another young priest. This became so bad, I eventually called my superior in St. Louis and said, "You don't want me to go to Honduras do you?" And she said, "Well, of course not. What would you do in Honduras?" And I said, "I don't know." And, she said, "Why are you calling me?" and I said, "Because I'm trying to get 2 priests off my back." So I called him and I said, "My superior said I couldn't go."

However, when Father Luke contacted Mary Elizabeth to ask for her help with his next project (opening an orphanage in the Caribbean), Mary Elizabeth received a quite different response from her superior with regard to her lifelong dream and constant offers.

Father Luke said, "Well I'm interested in going down and seeing [the island] and seeing if it's a good place for an orphanage and find property, etc." So, I called my superior again and I said, "I'm gonna nip this one in the bud." So, when I said, "You know that crazy priest that wants me to go to Honduras? Now he wants me to go to the Caribbean and help him find property and decide whether or not to open an orphanage." And she said, "Oh what a privilege." So I went and I was completely captivated by the [island] people.

While on that first trip to the Caribbean, they saw many sick and dying children. When Father Luke decided that the children needed a hospital, he enlisted Mary Elizabeth's help. Although neither Father Luke nor Mary Elizabeth had any experience or knowledge about hospitals, they found a friend from the US to supply most of the funds, negotiated to buy "a rundown hotel that had closed" and made it into a children's hospital, now one of the island's best, serving 1400 children a month. The orphanage founded from that original visit houses 530 orphans with a waiting list for more. At the time of our interview, Mary Elizabeth was spending three months in winter and three months in summer the Caribbean, alternating between her role there and her continued work at the university.

As much as she loved the children she taught and worked with as an educator and administrator, Mary Elizabeth's smiling face revealed her deep love for the children of the Caribbean as she described her time with them.

I sit on the steps with them and we try to teach them to read or whatever. To do some simple math. That's the only teaching I do. I usually just entertain them. ... I love it because, you see, children that would have nothing are just blossoming with education and love, you know?

Although she was 80 years old at the time of our interview, an age when our society and many of her friends and acquaintances said she should retire, Mary Elizabeth dismissed such thoughts.

If I was told never to go to the Caribbean again, I'd probably go to Tijuana and see what I could do there. There are orphanages there. There is always plenty to do. I just couldn't sit around and grow old. I have a lot of mental energy. I personally don't think there is any true joy in life unless you're serving others. That, to me, is true fulfillment of life.

Donna Key Hotay

Donna chose the pseudonym by which she would be known in this study. She noted that she always wanted to use the name as a pen name. As I listened to her story, I realized how well it fit her. She took on challenges and tried to make her world a better place. She was a female Don Quixote.

Donna was 72 at the time of our interview. We met at the nature preserve where she has devoted her time, energy and efforts for many years. Her look reminded me of the stereotypical picture of a nature-lover and indeed, that is exactly what she was. She was dressed in jeans and a red polo embroidered with a Park and Recreation logo. She wore no makeup, no-nonsense tortoise shell glasses and a short crop of gray hair framed her face. She struck me as a “healthy outdoor type,” no-nonsense, non-pretentious, conscious of the environment and not into frills. I liked her immediately.

Donna was right at home at the center and, as her story revealed, her whole life prepared her for her work there. She had spent much of her adult life devoted to the canyon preserve that hosted the nature center, and had been a nature lover since she was a child. She grew up in a home surrounded by eight acres of oak forest and spent much of her youth out of doors, influenced by adults who loved nature and introduced her to its wonders. As a child, she was inspired by an adult friend of her family, who was a taxidermist, and his wife who was a nature writer. The taxidermist showed her “all the internal workings of living things and animals” and the nature writer introduced her to Julian Burroughs, the son of the famous naturalist, John Burrows. It was Julian Burroughs who took her “on wonderful expeditions to places like the ‘Quaking Bog.’ It was a peat bog, that when you walked on it, it was like walking on a bowl full of Jell-O. The ground shook when you stepped on it.” She recalled her childhood with a smile:

Oh gosh, I had a wonderful time! I used to roam all over the local mountains on horseback. I had a plethora of pet snakes that lived in the area around our basement windows for a limit of five days and then I was required to release them. The taxidermist showed me how to mount butterflies and moths and insects in general so I had quite a collection of those too. The summer I was 16 I worked at a big resort, not as a waitress but in the garden. Because I had a lot of trail experience with horses I was able to take some of the horses from the stable and ride more of the trails. There were over a thousand miles of trails in the mountains. I had a wonderful childhood!

Following high school, Donna wished to go to Cornell University to study entomology but "all the veterans were coming back from World War II and the colleges were loathe to deny them." Although she had good grades and exam scores and came in fourth on her county's scholarship test, Cornell only gave scholarships to the top three. So, Donna enrolled in a college in east Tennessee, where she met her husband. Donna and her husband came to San Diego for the first time in 1949 "While I was still in college, I got off the train in Santa Fe station and looked around for fifteen minutes and said okay, this is the place!"

They had three children whom Donna described in terms of their interest in nature. "My daughter, who had bugs of all kinds, thought snakes were really horrible creatures. My older son is a very good birder and lover of nature of all

kinds as my second son is pretty much too.” When the youngest child was about twelve years old, Donna applied for a job with the City Park outdoor elementary education program. Because she did not expect the job to come through, when a teacher friend asked her to become involved in a campaign to save the canyon near her home as an open park space, she got involved and gave her first speech before the city council in 1971. Although she got the job and worked for the next 21 and a half years in the park program, she continued to work “in a sort of parallel life” to get the canyon preserved as a park and has been involved to some extent with the canyon ever since.

Her volunteer work for the canyon remained her passion. During our interview, when Donna answered questions about other aspects of her life, she always quickly returned to the subject of the canyon and reminisced about dates, people, facts and figures from as far back as 1971. Since 1978 she has been a mayoral appointee on an advisory committee representing various county districts around the canyon. When a state proposition changed the financial picture for the canyon park, Donna and her friends took action.

We had a couple of options. We could make an outline of what we wanted in the master plan and let it gather dust somewhere and be ignored or we could assemble the data and do it ourselves and that is what we did. It took two years of my life right there. Ours was the first master plan for one of the open space parks to be adopted with almost no change. We’ve done some good stuff for the city.

Through her work for the canyon, Donna learned about politics and about dealing with different types of political personalities. "I have been through mayors and city councils since [the 1970's]. And, you had to adjust your approach to each new elected official, group of elected officials." Donna's committee worked many years to get a visitor's center constructed and staffed by park rangers at about the time she retired from her job in 1993-94. Except for a three-year break, she has been on the committee since the beginning. "There was a three year hiatus but things were such a mess I offered to take it back."

It is Donna's passion for and unselfish dedication to the canyon preserve that led to her latest leadership endeavor. Her desire to see the preserve's successful continuation became the impetus for her recent initiation of an education program that would help ensure the preserve's sustenance after she leaves.

I can't keep on forever. Somewhere out there among these young people there has got to be somebody who is going to carry the torch after I can't anymore. In order to keep this going we want the children to come in. They learn about stewardship of places like this... and having a stake in this canyon. That's the goal: to make this sort of a self-sustaining place.

Donna had big plans for this educational program she had recently started. She began with a contact with an elementary school and brought classes to the center several times during the year. To build the program, she built collaboratives throughout the city. At the time of our interview, the program

included the elementary school she had originally contacted, use of the center by a museum and a variety of programs including an annual spring gathering of Southern California Native Americans. She has recently received funding to expand the nature center to include another classroom and a staff person to run the educational program. Her desire is to expand to other elementary, middle and high schools in the area. "This outdoor classroom, right in the middle of the city with easy access from the freeway, could be a real showpiece, an educational showpiece. And, that's what I am hoping will be the final result."

Donna kept going at her efforts, partly out of a desire to keep active. Without it she said, "I would be bored out of my head. When I had cataract surgery last week and I was sort of grounded for a couple of days, it just about drove me nuts." But, Donna's enthusiasm for the work she had done and the meaning of the work for her community and the world and most importantly, for nature, kept her going despite the obstacles.

It's just that I get tired. I think gosh, I worked so hard and I have not been able to let go because I don't want things to backslide. And that is what I am afraid of what will happen, if I suddenly were unable or decide to stop doing this: that it will backslide and it's not going to work like it should. That's why I am hoping that once we get the center expanded, get a staff person to run the educational program that I will be able to say, "whew" and rest on the oars a bit.

Her vigilance could take a toll, however. At recent planning and public committee meetings, there was "some pretty near violent opposition to some of

our ideas.” In fact, police protection was necessary at some of the meetings. Donna’s conviction about the canyon preserve and lessons about loyalty and conviction learned in her childhood made her “one of the few people who stood up to [the opposition] publicly. All the guys hiding under the table you know.” She attributed that courage to her high school days when her father, a superintendent of schools, stood up to the school board in a way that caused many to abandon him. When her father explained his reasoning to her, Donna stood by him.

My senior year in high school there were probably two or three people who would speak to me because of who my father was. So I went to my father and I said, “You know, what’s up?” He explained to me ... and I said, “Sounds right to me.” It stiffened my backbone and built character. I had one or two friends that had stuck by me and I valued character at that time. Then it was funny, because years later ... I was in my late fifties by then ... I was back in this little town ... and all of a sudden it was very emotional. It hit me. The people that I was angriest at were not the minority that were making my family’s life miserable, but it was the big silent majority that came through when the vote came after a year of hell. They just left us twisting and turning in the wind. I haven’t been back since.

Lifelong lessons of courage, conviction, and loyalty have helped Donna follow through with her activities for the canyon preserve. However, her work with the canyon was not the only activity that took Donna’s time. She was also involved with an international bead society with which she also does some of her

extensive traveling. But all comes back to her love of nature. She had been to six continents including Africa, to which she had traveled four times and had another trip there already planned. Africa is her “favorite place in the world because of the element of nature and wildlife and how they all work together.” She had also taken part in some Earthwatch expeditions.

I've done three in Africa, one in Kenya at Lake Navasha, one in Botswana and the other one on elephants and the last one I did was in Namibia with cheetahs. Which was primo! And I worked in the snake dens in Manitoba with little garter snakes. They're beautiful little creatures. I just had a wonderful time!

Donna's love of nature and care for the earth even pervade her self-descriptions. The phrase she chose to portray herself was, “I never leave a shopping cart in the middle of a parking lot.” She explained her description by expounding on her philosophy about keeping her environment as she found it.

Individuals need to consider the people around them! It infuriates me when I see an empty parking spot and somebody has left a shopping cart right in the middle of it. So I have vowed, as per the golden rule, not to do that. I take canvas bags to the store, because I detest those little flimsy plastic things and all they do is foul up the environment and whales eat them thinking they are jellyfish.

Persistence is another descriptor Donna used for herself. Her work with the canyon preserve has been a testament to that persistence.

I have a tendency to just keep going, sort of like a bulldog, when I get my teeth into something I want to get, you know I don't want to just quit in the middle of it. Once the park was dedicated, many people just sort of thought, "Okay, we're done, see ya." That's been one obstacle to overcome. [I] can't let go until it is cast in concrete so to speak.

As is evident from her examples, her speech, her activities, Donna's whole life has been devoted to her love of nature. Even her lifelong role models include a list of naturalists and community activists. As a child, she read books by Osa Johnson about the wildlife in Africa drawn by the author's "sense of adventure and exploration in all parts of the world. I thought, 'Man, that's the life for me!'" While Osa Johnson sparked her sense of adventure and love of nature, other role models taught her lessons about the importance of being proactive in her community. "Jane Goodall's a wonderful role model. I heard her speak [and say] 'think globally but act locally' and without realizing that that had sort of been my way but, really, it fortified it for me." From another role model, Donna learned that "elected officials come and go but citizen activists are there always." Donna's life has been a tribute to the combination of models she holds in esteem.

Throughout her life, Donna faced and overcame a series of health issues. In her thirties, she was diagnosed with Lupus, a painful and debilitating disease. In her forties, she had a bout with plantar faciitis, which caused a great deal of pain in her foot. Just days prior to our interview, she had undergone cataract surgery. But these and other health challenges have not kept her down for long.

I get pretty creaky some days. That is age and the Lupus. [But] I am pretty well repaired ... I have had some skin cancer removed. I have had a tooth fixed. I've had my eyes fixed. I've had a thumb that didn't work fixed. Now I have got one ankle that has been a problem.

Once I get that fixed, I will be off and running again!

With all the health challenges she has faced, old age itself has not been an obstacle for Donna. She has not bought into the stereotypes of aging and has continued to be a vital and active leader in her community. To her, "Sixty-five is not old anymore." Quite the contrary, her old age has been a time for trying new areas of activity. In fact, Donna finds her old age freeing in that it has offered her choices she did not feel she had earlier in her life.

I'm far busier now than I used to be. And it's much more interesting also. And, if there's something going on I don't care for, I can say, "See ya." I have a lot more choices in my activities and my volunteerism and my activism because I don't have to do it if it's not satisfactory. I think anybody who decides they are not going to do anything at all, it's very sad. I think they're missing so much.

Old age is a time of excitement and continued exploration for Donna. Her advice to other old women: "Hang in there dears. [Old age] is just a doorway into all kinds of opportunity."

Sylvia

At the time of our interview, Sylvia was an 81 year-old mother of five, grandmother of 16 and great-grandmother of 51. Since the interview, four great-

grandchildren had been added to her family and another was on the way. Somehow, as illogical as it may seem, because of the sheer numbers of her progeny, I expected her to be a large and imposing woman, not the quiet, gentle and petite woman who greeted me with a warm smile and an invitation to sip tea at her dining room table. I felt immediately as if I had known her forever. Sylvia brought the tea and cookies to the table and the interview took on a tea party atmosphere, chatty and friendly from the beginning.

Like several of the women in the study, Sylvia shared with me copies of newspaper articles that had been written about her many accomplishments as well as a typed biography she updated every few years, for use by interviewers such as me. These pages illuminated just some of the accomplishments, awards, and recognitions she has received.

Before her old age, Sylvia had been a teacher of students of all ages from preschool to high school to college. She had also worked as a social worker, director of a career center for women, designer and presenter of workshops, and a consultant, business owner and writer. She had several college degrees, including a bachelor's degree in Education and a master's degree in English.

She was born in 1920 in the Bronx, New York and was a tried and true New Yorker. When asked about the highlights of her life, her first response was, "The fact that I was born in New York is a highlight." Then, unlike all the other women I interviewed, she skipped over her entire childhood and went straight to her years of working in New York City following her graduation from high school at age 15.

I worked in downtown New York, taking subways and being very much a New Yorker. I gave blood at my lunch hour; I went to the library; I went to the museums and the art galleries and just loved the whole ambiance that is New York.

As a young girl, Sylvia had thought about a career in nursing, “but you have to earn a living and we didn’t have much money so I did the clerical thing.” She worked her way up to a civil service job making \$1400 a year and attended classes at night, studying on the subway rides on her way home. Books became her constant companion and carrying them with her became a lifelong habit. As she reminisced, she noted, “I always had a book. I still do,” and then she digressed a bit to tell me of the book she just finished reading about politics in Washington DC written by one of the editors of the *Washington Post*.

At age 21, Sylvia married and she and her husband moved to the Midwest. Although Sylvia was pregnant at the time of the move, she wished to work and found a job “in some kind of social work”. Her job was to pick up runaway teens at the town train station and help them find a place to live. During her work with the agency, Sylvia witnessed a great deal of discrimination against the teens she was helping. She claimed it was her New York upbringing that not only made these experiences disturbing to her, but also caused her to speak up against the injustices. She recalled an incident “when I brought them into a restaurant where they were not treated well, the New Yorker in me and my feelings about that made me speak up. I said, ‘You are serving two people who are here to get a meal!’”

Though this was her first foray into paid social service work, it was not her first work with troubled teens. At age 17, Sylvia had decided that she wanted to eventually marry and raise a family. Having no experience with children, Sylvia set about to systematically "learn something about children from the youngest to the oldest." With her goal in mind and always curious to try new things, she volunteered in a series of positions where she could gain a variety of experience. To learn about infants, she found an agency that cared for children whose parents had died or had been declared unfit. Her job was to hold and provide physical contact for the infants who ranged in age from about two months to about fourteen months. "Some of them were the most placid infants that I have ever seen but the idea was holding them and giving them the contact. I learned a lot about that kind of need for the younger children."

Sylvia continued along these lines throughout her life. "I've done a lot of social work during the years. One thing kind of led to another." During World War II, Sylvia worked with children who had been sent, for their safety, to the US from Britain. This experience foreshadowed much of her later work in the area of teaching.

Some of them were very troubled. They felt abandoned by their parents and I remember one child who would hang his father in effigy. ... But I learned not only to get along well and to work well with that group. It was a kind of teaching and that gave me an interest, which allowed me to make some decisions later on.

While still in New York and only 17 years old herself, Sylvia found yet another volunteer position working with a group of teenagers who had been labeled as potential for trouble or who had already been involved with juvenile court. Sylvia took the groups on excursions around the city so they could “learn from each other in terms of making relationships and relating to others.” While the experience was no doubt beneficial for the teens with whom she during these experiences, it was Sylvia who took long-lasting lessons with her.

I gained a good understanding of the relationship with the young people who were really struggling to know who they were and to be able to live the kind of life that was not like their mothers and fathers were. Some of them were abused, and so on. So it gave me a little broader picture.

Following her move to the Midwest, Sylvia found a job as a girls’ probation officer. Although she lacked professional training or schooling for this particular job, she was hired because “I guess I had the personality they were looking for.” As she did throughout her interview when she shared about her past experiences, Sylvia recalled lessons she learned from her work. She had to perform some emotionally difficult tasks such as removing from their homes children who were in physical and/or emotional danger or distress. From that job she said she learned more about compassion and empathy and how she herself might respond under extremely trying circumstances.

While living in the Midwest, Sylvia and her husband had five children. Involvement in the lives of her children led her to even more new experiences.

She admitted, "Whatever it was my kids were involved in I probably got involved too." For example, Sylvia wanted her children to have a preschool experience, but preschools were not the norm at that time. Not one to be thwarted by the way things were, Sylvia took matters into her own hands and created, taught in, and hired others to teach her children and the others who enrolled.

Her gift at teaching and her ability and willingness to recognize needs and find ways to fill them led Sylvia to a number of teaching positions throughout her life. When she saw the need for adult education, she taught evening classes in a number of subjects from child development to writing classes for seniors. While in the Midwest, she worked in elementary, junior and senior high schools teaching History, English, Journalism, and Speech. Always busy and constantly expanding her mind and her horizons, Sylvia also led a book discussion group, taught writing classes for seniors, and presented "Be a Poet" programs in schools, libraries and community centers. Sylvia credits her husband for supporting and encouraging her growth and activism.

I had a really good husband. He had three sisters and his mother was a strong person who expected everybody to carry their own weight. Boys *and* girls. He was not the kind that felt he should be in charge of everything. He was not only willing but he babysat at night. He was a strong person himself and he didn't feel that [my activities or growth] put him down, which was unusual in those times. He died in 1971 and I miss him a lot.

With her husband's support and her own determination, Sylvia pursued her Master's degree in English. It took determination to make the one and a half hour drive to the university for her 7:00am classes. "I would fall asleep a lot. I remember I would take notes, and every once in a while I would look over my notes and I would see the line down [the paper] where I fell asleep."

When Sylvia's husband passed away in 1971, she went back to elementary teaching to support her family. Finding that it was not really what she wanted to do with her life, however, she took less traditional, but more personally suited jobs, one working with teenage dropouts, where her earlier experience and ability to build relationships with troubled teens paid off.

I worked in a pretty rough neighborhood. Everybody's cars would get damaged. But I established enough of a good relationship that my car was never damaged. The first week I was there, I got a kind of call that just scared me and I knew it was one of the kids in the class. I never said a word and they knew they couldn't intimidate me. I learned to love those kids and when I left, they came and they hugged me.

But it was the combination of her experiences and her great empathy, derived from childhood and nurtured through her adult experiences that served both her and the children with whom she worked. Sylvia saw much but was not one to judge others. She used her compassion and creativity to find innovative ideas that were relevant to and thus made a difference in the lives of those with whom she worked.

When you go to some of the homes and you realize what they have to cope with, parents who are either on drugs or alcohol or their home is a mess, it gave me more empathy toward people. You learn, and you don't make judgments, but [just think about] how can you help the child. I would take them on trips to the store like we were going to have a party [and had to] figure out [a budget if] we have this much money. I would teach them math in terms of that. Or I would give them an opportunity to set up a library. The library probably was not the library you would [normally] see. It was a mix of everything. But they were reading!

Sylvia' empathy and lack of judgment of others was a hallmark of her life and shone through in her recollections.

With each new experience, Sylvia continued to learn new skills that would later serve in other ways to help her help others. She spoke during the interview of her love of learning new things and recognizing "the joy of knowing things you don't know now." At age 50, she took work as a job developer at a women's shelter where it was her job to find work for the women who came into the agency. Even in that job, she found herself learning a variety of new skills so she could help others.

First I had to learn about women in need and about women's jobs and about some of the jobs that are not traditionally women's jobs. In order for me to learn, I went to places where I asked them to put me through some of the training and study that someone would

have to go through to do that, such as welding or getting up on a roof and tarring.

Not surprisingly, Sylvia eventually became the director of the career center for women. But it was not without its challenges. Sylvia spent some time answering crisis calls for the center and spoke of the courage of the women with whom she talked on those phone calls. Her own courage came to play time and again in that job, protecting the women who came to the shelter. "There were men out there with guns, and we had to call the police because their girlfriend or their wife had chosen to come. Of course, we didn't tell them where they were. They were in a safe house, you know."

Sylvia had several role models beginning with her mother about whose strength of character and purpose set an example for the family. While Sylvia's mother was her role model for her early life and adulthood, a friend who is now in her nineties but whom Sylvia met when the friend was 80, serves as a role model for old age.

She was able to be membership chair for the Older Women's League and did things so late in life. And she had strength of character and even though she had some physical things wrong with her, she didn't let the physical things stop her.

Sylvia certainly never let age stop her either. In her sixties, after a few years of traveling the state presenting workshops and seminars for women in a business of her own, Sylvia decided she was finished with cold weather. Still needing to support herself and her children who were in college, she approached

her decision in a characteristic manner and set out to learn about where she might relocate. So she stored her furniture and traveled to Georgia, Florida, Texas, and Arizona to check the environments, the people and the opportunities. Her travels eventually led her to California. She found an apartment and gave herself two months to find work before her money would run out. One week short of the two month mark, she found a job helping immigrants and refugees get jobs.

Although she had a long history of advocacy for others, it was at that job that Sylvia said she learned the most about both adversity and diversity and helping others deal with discrimination. But in the search for that job, Sylvia experienced a form of discrimination herself.

Because of my age, the getting of that first job was really tough and I was getting a lot of discrimination. There is no other word for it. Even though I was careful to let them know that I had the qualifications, there was no question in my mind that first there was ageism and then there was also sexism and all of that interfered with my getting work more quickly.

As one might expect, Sylvia was not one to take discrimination lying down. Always ready to stand up not only for herself but for others, Sylvia found a venue in which she could address these issues and make a difference in the lives of others. She tackled it with the verve with which she has taken on activities, projects and causes throughout her life.

I had read in the paper about an [organization for older women] and then I said, "I'm just going to see what that's like." If it's just a coffee klatch, then forget it. I went there and I was impressed with their goals. So I joined and I became very active and I have been all through the years that I have been here. I was a program chair and then I was vice-president and then I was president three different times. At the same time I also was involved at the state level of the [organization for older women]. While I was doing that I became interested in all the legislative activities that have to do with mid-life and older women as well as women in general. So I elected to get on the boards of different places that would make a difference. I was in [two state legislative organizations for seniors].

How did she find time and energy for all her work? Sylvia admitted that one of the obstacles she had to overcome to manage all she did was to find balance in her life. One way she achieved that is with physical activity. In her seventies, she entered the Senior Olympics "to show people you can be any age and you can try it." Try she did and she won a Silver Medal in Swimming.

During the interview, Sylvia's voice became quieter as she spoke of some of the obstacles she had faced in her life, including the death of loved ones. "I have had a lot of losses because I am 80 years old. You expect to have losses." She spoke of the loss of her mother, father, a grandchild, her husband, and her most recent loss of her son just months before our interview. Prior to his death, she cared for him in her home. It was a precious time for her and she spoke of it

during the interview. "I have found out so much more [about him]. And I have received a number of calls and letters from people who knew him, who said he helped them in so many ways." She continued, speaking about her son but certainly describing herself and the many contributions she has made during her 81 years when she said, "We just don't know the extent to which [we] influence others."

But Sylvia moved quickly from discussing her grief to the lessons she has learned from it and the other obstacles she had faced in her life.

Obstacles let you know that you can not only move on but learn, [even] from grief. I always try to make an obstacle into the opposite. I'm using my present grief, which is considerable, as a way to revamp, revise myself. Things that I wish I had done, I'm going to do next time. So it's both an obstacle and an opportunity.

This resilience and positive life attitude was a characteristic she recognized in herself. When asked to describe herself she used words like "fortunate" and "forthright" and "independent." And in realizing the many opportunities she had been given in her life, she reverted *right back* to her desire to help others.

I realize how fortunate I am to be where I am, that there is much to look forward to. I recognize how many people are not in that place and we have to fight for them too, things that can really make a difference. I feel strongly about a lot of things.

When asked about old age, Sylvia's responses were a mixture of vulnerability and strength. She spoke about the vulnerability of recognizing that there is an end to one's life that is "not so distant that you can't even conceive of it." And she related her frustration with our societal view of old age and her desire that others "just treat me as if I am a human being." Sylvia's advice to other old women is to "speak up and be strong. ... The one thing I would hope for both for young and old is that we recognize that we are learning all the time and it doesn't stop whether you are 99 or nine."

Ruby

When I called Ruby to introduce myself and the study and ask if she would agree to be interviewed, she was polite and open to seeing me. However, she made it clear that she had been interviewed often and that she was busy so I would have to come to her if I wanted her participation in the study. From this interchange, I expected a no-nonsense kind of a woman to greet me when I pulled up to her home. But when I arrived, Ruby opened the door and immediately greeted me with a warm hug and a wonderful smile.

She wore wire-rimmed tortoise shell glasses. Her white hair was pulled up tight in a knot on top of her head. She wore purple pants with a long matching purple t-shirt like top, and comfortable-looking walking shoes. Her jewelry included a large gold herring bone necklace, gold button earrings, and a black cord around her neck with what looked like a pen attached to it. She looked very put-together, casual but fashionably bright. The look portrayed both flair and what

my mom used to call “the sturdy brown oxford” type, a combination that said, “Let’s get down to business but let’s have fun while we’re at it.”

We began in the living room of her home, which was filled with books and memorabilia. There were stacks of framed award certificates, photographs and drawings, and boxes filled with more certificates, all tributes to her service to her community and for which she had not found the time or wall space to display. Although we began the interview in the living room, we soon moved to the dining room table to have more room to set down the tape recorder. Even the dining table was stacked with papers for her many projects. Next to the table was a computer on a stand and on a credenza in back of us was a printer and what appeared to be a fax machine. The dining room clearly served as her office and was filled of the workings of her daily life.

As I was getting ready to leave at the conclusion of the interview, Ruby showed me some of the many certificates she had received, photographs of herself and political figures and reprints of magazine, newspaper articles that have been written about her. Like some of the other women I interviewed, Ruby gave me a typed piece of paper that explained some of her extensive list of past and present activities, as well as some of the many awards she has received. At the bottom of this sheet of paper was the statement: “Ruby is a cancer survivor, having been operated on for lung cancer in January 2000 at age 80. She attests her recovery to “God’s Grace and Mercy.”

Ruby was just shy of 83 years of age when we met. She was born in 1919. Her first memory was being left in the snow by her sister when she was

only three. She and her sister were walking home from a visit to their aunt's home. Her sister was impatient with how slowly she was walking. Ruby refused to walk the way her sister wanted and simply sat down in the snow and would not move. So, her sister went home without her. She vividly recalls her grandparents, with whom she lived, coming to get her. "By that time I had kind of sunk down [in the snow] but they could see the cavity where I was and so they brought me on home." When asked if she had been frightened, she replied, "No. Because I knew exactly where I was."

This story is an apt metaphor for Ruby's life. She appears to have set her own course, sometimes getting "sunk down" into things but always being grounded by knowing where she was and what she wanted.

I have a very headstrong ways. [When] I make up my mind about something, it is not easy for me to change it. I have this element of self-indulgence because I feel I am the most important person in my life. If I'm happy, then the people around me are happy and if I'm not, I don't contribute to their happiness. So before that phrase came out if "mom is happy the kids and dad are happy," that was me way before then.

Ruby's philosophy may have come from a childhood in which she describes being "quite spoiled with this huge family of uncles and aunts who had no children so we felt we could ask for anything or have them do anything for us that we wanted because we were the only grandchildren." During her early childhood, Ruby and her sister lived with their maternal grandparents who

imparted to her strong values and a sense of self-worth, both of which carried throughout her life. Both grandparents had been slaves and although her grandmother had been a house slave and had learned to read and write, her grandfather had not. However, he memorized the Bible and taught Ruby and her sister Bible lessons from sections he had memorized. She recalled him as a proud, caring and attentive man whom she loved dearly and whose wisdom and lessons are still a part of the manner in which she conducts her life.

During the Depression, when Ruby was eleven, her grandfather died and Ruby's sister went to live with an aunt. Memories from those years made a lasting impact.

I remember people, that we had thought owned their homes, being displaced and grown men standing in soup lines and that [memory] sticks with me. The despair of the men is what I remember the most, especially in church: people who had been kind of the pillars of church, the men kind of being diminished.

She learned from those years was about "the impermanence of things." And the lesson that she brought with her from those memories was the determination that what she had seen would never happen to her.

In fact, at the age of fifteen, Ruby went to Washington, D.C. to live with her aunt who was to be the next great role model in Ruby's life. Her aunt taught her about how to fend for herself and be financially self-supporting. Ruby described her aunt as an entrepreneur who "always had some kind of business going" and the time she spent with her was a turning point in Ruby's life.

Her aunt also provided her with an education by sending her to a Catholic boarding school for Black girls. Both the religion and the discipline of the school had a lifelong influence on Ruby. She defined them as the defining years of her life. While at the school, Ruby converted to Catholicism from the Baptist religion in which she was raised. She also learned to adhere to the boarding school's rigid schedule in which she said every hour had to be accounted for. Although Ruby eventually left the Catholic church because of its imposed segregation in some of the church services she attended, Ruby carried throughout her life the lessons of the importance of structure that she learned during those years. Certainly a look at her many accomplishments would testify to the self-discipline with which she has lived her life.

From boarding school, Ruby went on to college at Howard University. She described her enrollment there as a revelation in more ways than one. She lived at home and still did not feel she had the freedom of the girls who went away to college. She remembered "being appalled going into the women's lounge and seeing girls smoking. You know, they were decadent." Even so, she felt a sense of freedom from the rigidity and structure of the boarding school. However, while she had always excelled as a student prior to college, "When I got to college I was just one of the excellent people. When you are used to being the valedictorian, to go to college with the cream of the crop from all over the country was kind of a humbling experience."

Although lack of money kept her from completing a degree, Ruby majored in pre-law as a step toward fulfilling her lifelong ambition to be the first woman on the Supreme Court.

I don't know where I ever dreamed that up but, when anybody asked [my] ambition, it was to be the first woman to be on the Supreme Court. It never occurred to me to say the first Black woman. I just wanted to be the first woman on the Supreme Court. Even as old as I was when O'Connor was appointed, I was just a little disappointed even though I never got a law degree.

Ruby worked during her first year of college and then quit school to work full time. During the next few years, she was in and out of school, and by the time she came to San Diego in 1957, Ruby "had more credits than I needed for graduation but not enough in any for any degree." San Diego State College was offering a degree using credits for work experience and although others encouraged her to seek the degree, Ruby never did so. She had more pressing items on her agenda.

It was at that time in her life, however, that the political activism that has characterized the remainder of her adult life was begun. Ruby's sister spurred her involvement in politics by asking her to walk a precinct to help elect the first Black man running for the San Diego City Council. It was not until years later, at the time of her disability retirement at age 51, that Ruby's community activism began to soar the heights she has achieved today.

It was yet another woman who encouraged Ruby to become involved in her community, even though Ruby had no plans for any such thing. "This neighbor of mine found out I had retired. I think she thought I should not *not* be doing something. I told her, 'I am sick and disabled. That's how come I retired.'" But her neighbor would not take no for an answer and told Ruby, "Well, you get up and do something that will help you." Ruby recalled with a smile, "She dragged me out into everything."

Her first real foray on her own into community activism and the political process involved a city development and highway issue on which she worked for fifteen years. What kept her going on one issue for that length of time through all the ups and downs of politics? "I was plain mad!" she emphasized. From that issue and the experiences she gleaned from the years of work for her community came more activism and opportunities to broaden her influence by serving on boards and commissions. I asked her why she did it all. Her answer came with a twinkle in her eye, "Because it's fun. You get to places you never would have gone, you meet people you never would have met." But there is a deeper reason for Ruby's dedication, a sense of purpose and service to God and her fellow human beings, and a sense of accomplishment. She explained, "You think that things are a little bit better because you did something."

Ruby's sense of service and purpose is profound. At the age of 80, she was diagnosed with lung cancer for which she underwent surgery. The diagnosis made a profound impact on Ruby and made her "a little more aware of what's

important in life.” Because of her survival, she believes that she still has more left to do.

I have to keep doing something as long as I am here. I will be 83 in May if I live. Why is [God] leaving me here? To do something. So I have to keep doing. Maybe when I find out what it is, He'll say you're through.

So Ruby found needs to fill and filled them. At the age of 81, when she heard of a need at the police department, she volunteered to be serve on the department's volunteer patrol. She had gone to a luncheon honoring an RSVP from another city that had 50 RSVP volunteers. When she found out her neighborhood had only fifteen, she signed up. In addition, she has taken on leadership positions in a variety of organizations in which she participates, serves on several boards and has received numerous awards including the naming of her eightieth birthday as “Ruby Day” in both the city and county and being honored as County RSVP Volunteer of the Year when she was 81.

Considering all the leadership positions she has undertaken as well as the recognition for her efforts she has received, I asked her if she considered herself a leader. Her answer revealed her philosophy of leadership. “I am a leader,” she replied, “because I follow orders.”

A lot of people say they are leaders or think they are leaders but if you look there is nobody behind them. In order to be a leader you have to ...define the problem but then you find other people who are going to help you work to solve it. I might be the person who has the

idea that maybe we ought to do this but then I don't go looking and say, "Maybe we ought to do this. Will you do it?" I say, "Maybe we ought to do this. Will you do such and such to help get it done?"

Ruby possessed a wonderful humility with regard to her leadership ability. While many might tout skills and talents such as hers in a boastful fashion, Ruby believed her greatest leadership accomplishment was helping others make a contribution. "I think more than anything else what I managed to do is bring people together who normally would not be together."

... especially people who don't think they can do anything, [I] show them what they can do to make a contribution. I like to encourage people. Everybody has a talent. Everybody has a job to do. I like to tell them that and maybe, in talking to them, I can help them find out what it is. I know I helped recruit two people to the RSVP program and everybody I have talked to and told them that these two particular people have joined are amazed. [They ask me how I got them.] I told them they could do it. I think they probably never thought they could. That's what I enjoy doing: encouraging people to stretch themselves.

These days Ruby is most encouraged by "family, close friends, the things that I feel I have a sense of accomplishment about." Always in the forefront, Ruby knows what it is like to accomplish great things and to stretch the boundaries of one's life. In her first job after World War II, she was the first person of color in that organization to work at a desk. She recalled, "They had Black workers but

they were all in janitorial or serving or that sort of thing. They would come down the hall and open the door and look in. I guess it was a phenomenon.”

But Ruby affirmed with a sigh that one of the reasons she kept trying to involve others is that she “got so tired of being the first Black.” Her race made her stand out in some of the activities she pursued but as she pointed out about her dream to be the first woman on the Supreme Court, she would like to be known first as a woman and then as a Black woman. When a fellow student who gave a presentation in one of the community college classes in which Ruby is enrolled asked the group how they would like to be identified, Ruby noted, “I would like to be called ‘people.’”

She persists in her efforts to “find more people to stretch” but she looks forward to curtailing some of her efforts. Ruby admitted to some physical problems with her knees and feeling “just old age.” When her sister became ill several years ago, Ruby took a leave of absence from her many activities to conserve her own energy to care for and spend time with her sister. Although her sister passed away, it was her sister’s encouragement that kept Ruby active. Even during the time of her sister’s illness, the two women remained actively interested in politics. She recalled staying up late at night with her sister, discussing political issues and how to solve community as well as national issues. “We [learned] a lot about national politics. It was tremendously interesting, just the two of us here. We would run up and down the hall. We stayed up all night long!”

It is that energy and enthusiasm for life that characterizes Ruby even in her eighties. She describes herself as “dynamic,” an adjective that seems too small in light of the many accomplishments of her past and present and the number of activities in which she is still an active leader. She enjoys old age, saying with a smile, “I think it is great” and her advice to old women who may have others telling them to slow down when they are involved in activities in which they want to stay involved is to “keep doing it and tell them to go to hell.” In fact, Ruby finds a freedom in old age “because you can do whatever you want to do”

As Ruby stated many times during our interview, “We each have a unique purpose. The only thing that I deplore is people who don’t get involved in things.” Ruby seemed to have found unique purpose and her efforts and involvement have made a difference in the lives of many.

Quan Yin

I met Andi, a friend of Quan Yin’s where we were told to introduce ourselves and tell a bit about what we were doing. I told Andi about my dissertation and, without a moment’s hesitation she told me about her friend Quan Yin. Whether or not Quan Yin saw herself as a leader, others clearly did.

I contacted Quan Yin and was invited to her home for the interview. It was a lovely place in which I felt at peace from the minute I entered the small, enclosed entryway garden filled with lush green plants. The furnishings inside were opulent but not ostentatious, including a combination of beautiful antiques, a white baby grand piano, mirrored lighted shelves displaying artistic pieces of

crystal, Lladro sculpture and Japanese sculpture, including several statutes of Asian goddesses. The room where we sat looked comfortable, serene and professionally decorated. As I was to find out, Quan Yin was a licensed interior designer and she decorated the house to make it a haven of beauty, comfort and peace.

I was surprised by Quan Yin's appearance when she opened her door. She was 68 but looked at least ten years younger. Her hair was blond, cut short in a modern style. She wore a professional looking crisp, tailored button-down shirt, blue blazer, and slacks and beautiful bone-colored earrings. Her makeup was tasteful and stylish including red lipstick, toenails, and fingernails. She carried herself with tremendous confidence and both gentility and gentleness.

I had been interviewing women older than Quan Yin, some almost 15 years her senior. I had expected her to look "older." When I saw her, I immediately thought, "Oh no! She isn't old enough to be in the study." Again I was face to face with my own prejudices and stereotypes about age, with my own preconceived notions about what an "old woman" should look like. This wealthy-looking, professional-looking, stylish women hit my senses and raised my consciousness. To my shame, I had found myself in the midst of societal stereotypical thinking that I had tried so hard to dismiss. How was I ever going to hope that society would change its views on age and especially old women when here I was harboring the same old ideas I so very much wanted to change in others?

Quan Yin met me with a smile and offered me a seat. She made herbal tea for me and served Girl Scout cookies (bought from her grandchild) that we ate while she sipped on a couple of glasses of white wine as we talked. Quan Yin's interview started somewhat differently than the others who had begun with a soft, smiling reminiscence about their childhood or early adulthood. When Quan Yin began to speak about her life, however, her first comment was, "My life? It's been hell." But she continued, "In some ways, it was a gift." That ability to look for the positive to counterbalance a negative characterized her interview as she detailed her life, describing herself more than relating incidents or telling stories, each description a positive response to a personality characteristic of or behavior by a family member.

For example, after noting that her mother was extremely self-centered, and describing her childhood with the phrase, "I was my mother's appliance," Quan Yin revealed that she got the attention she needed in her family by people-pleasing, a coping skill she carried for years after she left home. She noted,

I was only a kid and expected to take care of her kids and her house.

*There were just such high expectations of me. I was treated pretty much as an adult. But, it was in some ways it was not a bad childhood because I think I was just born with a pretty happy disposition and so when I was happy I was really happy and I was very happy when I was *not* doing the housework.*

Carrying most of the burden for the care of herself and her siblings, Quan Yin learned at an early age a lesson that many do not learn until much later in life, if at all: that she had to be responsible for herself.

I felt pretty much like an orphan much of the time. Turns out I had what I called denial, neglect. My clothes: the hem would be out, my shoes would have holes in the them, socks wouldn't match, hair wouldn't get shampooed until I finally just took hold of it when I was about nine years old when I started doing my grooming and washing and all the rest of it because I finally realized nobody was going to come along and do it for me. If I were going to be successful, I had to do it, and so I did.

So Quan Yin learned to care for herself and to make the most of her talents. She did well in school, which she viewed as a haven from housework and childcare. She found she had a flare for "attractive, beautiful, balanced and pretty things" but because of her eye for such beauty "felt acutely lacking in those things" herself. A childhood of trying to please adults and carry responsibility too great for a child led her to become an over-achiever.

Shortly before Quan Yin's family moved to California, her younger brother was born with cerebral palsy. Quan Yin became a defender of her brother whom she described as "one of the most determined individuals I have ever met in my life." When others teased or hurt him, she felt hurt. Growing up watching her brother deal with and overcome his disabilities to become a successful businessman, Quan Yin became acutely compassionate to people who have

difficulties of any kind. Her experiences with her brother and the compassion she gained growing up with him led her to volunteer work with the Red Cross and with a local psychiatric hospital.

Quan Yin married during her first year of college and had a son. She divorced after four years, married again a couple of years later and had a daughter. She described her second husband as a “very very bright but a very neurotic person. But so was I. We were perfect. It was just two sad, incompetent, mentally and emotionally, people coming together.” After making a decision to divorce after eight years of marriage, her life began to improve as she began to be even more proactive on her own behalf. She obtained her real estate license, bought homes that she fixed up and sold to support herself and her children. A few years after divorcing her second husband, Quan Yin met her third husband whom she described as “probably one of the most fun people I have ever known.” Though divorced, they remained good friends. But the events that led up to that divorce made a lasting impact. According to her, the hurt from that marriage has kept her from other relationships since that time. “It really broke my heart. I think it’s been keeping me fairly safe ever since. I don’t put it out there that far.”

Having been married three times in fifteen years, Quan Yin “literally [had] this sense that I don’t seem to do relationships that good so let’s see what else I can do.” She got her broker’s license, bought, decorated and sold more homes. In the meantime a number of friends began asking her to decorate for them.

Realizing she could make money for her talents, she became a licensed interior designer.

While at a party, she met a woman who spoke to her about the need for an auxiliary at a nearby children's shelter. Having been a volunteer all her adult life for the Red Cross and a local psychiatric hospital, Quan Yin was accustomed to participating in worthy ventures. Deciding that working with children might be more meaningful than the volunteer work she had been doing with adults since the children might "have a better chance of changing," she became a founding member of the auxiliary. But the shelter was in such disarray when she entered it for the first time, she left it in tears. She recounted her first visit:

The place was a disaster. It looked like something right out of Dickens. It was poorly run. There wasn't a piece of furniture that matched another piece. No door fronts fit, doors to cabinets falling off, holes in the carpet, paint peeling. It was depressing. And then here are these precious little kids, their noses running and big eyes, scared to death, crying babies. I left in shreds of emotional turmoil. I sobbed all the way home and said, "I just can't do this. I *cannot* do this."

After a week of soul searching about whether or not she could tolerate it, Quan Yin did go back to the shelter. "I realized I didn't die from the crying and if everybody who saw the need ran from it because it afflicted them that way, how would it ever change?" She had been there ever since, first helping to raise money and then using her skills as an interior designer to obtain furnishings and

redecorate the shelter. She had a wonderful sense of humor about the limits of what could be done and her love for the children there shined through in her description of the shelter:

It is still a dump. I say it is like putting lipstick on a pig. You still have a pig, but it is a pretty pig. It's an old dysfunctional building and there is only so much you can do but at least it's functional and the furniture doesn't make the kids feel like they're second-hand stuff.

After working as a volunteer at the shelter for several years, Quan Yin was asked to be their Director of Development, a position in which she continued to work at the time of the interview. The new job offered her a complete career change from real estate and was, as she called it, a gutsy move. She told herself it could not hurt to try and "in a rather conceited way, I thought I can't do worse than was done." She took it on, launching into the project full steam. She worked 70 hours or more a week, and took classes in grant writing and other topics she thought would be helpful. For five and a half years she was a "one-woman band there. I did the grants. I did the events. I did the presentations in the community. I did the networking in various clubs. I did tours. I did some fixing up as things needed doing."

After five years of this hectic pace, Quan Yin was diagnosed with an aggressive sarcoma on her thigh for which she underwent surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. She described the treatment as "a piece of cake" compared to the aftermath of the surgery, a lingering bout of an autoimmune

disease known as polymyalgia rheumatica that encased her in agonizing chronic pain.

I was like a bag of wet concrete. Riddled with pain. To turn over in bed could take fifteen minutes. Sometimes I just didn't get up because it was just too painful to move. And yet it was painful to be in bed. I mean there was no way you were not in pain.

Quan Yin had been on medication ever since. While the medication controlled some of the pain and some of the polymyalgia rheumatica had subsided, she lived with residual pain, especially in her hands and arms. But she refused to show it. She related an incident at a doctor's office when she was asked to draw a chart showing the areas and amount of her pain. When the doctor saw her after reading her chart, he did not believe she had the amount of pain she indicated. I asked how she was able to bear the pain without showing it. She replied, "You just push through it."

A dream interpretation group she had started 20 years earlier helped her deal with the pain and the stresses of the disease as well. That group had continued and "become quite a sisterhood." Although the disease, which had so suddenly and shockingly changed her life, made her take stock of her otherwise extremely good health and caused her to pay attention to diet, rest and exercise, it angered her. "I hate it. It pisses me off. It really does." But she coped by "just gritting your teeth and just getting through it. [I'm an] over-achiever. Nothing is going to stop me!"

It is her nothing-is-going-to-stop-me spirit that propelled her into her leadership activities in old age, which she had taken on with gusto. A friend of hers had been raped several months prior to the interview and shared with Quan Yin about how the case was handled by the police department. Quan Yin's voice was strong and firm as she related her friend's (and subsequently her own) frustration at the fact that unprocessed DNA rape kits sit on shelves in police stations across the country due to lack of funds to process them. After further investigation into the matter, Quan Yin became even more indignant about the situation. "I could not believe the incompetence and the lack of concern for women that is rampant in our legislature. It is so disgusting and so discounting of women. I thought this is just crazy. Why in the hell are we tolerating this?" Quan Yin used her anger and took action.

I talked to several of my friends about it and I said, "I just think this is outrageous. I am ashamed of us, for us to have tolerated this.

This is just plain not possible to tolerate anymore." And they agreed. And I said, "Let's start making some noise about it."

Since then, Quan Yin organized a group of women who met on a regular basis, each time asking those in attendance to bring one other woman to the next meeting, thus always doubling the size of the group. Not one to think small, her goal was to raise awareness with huge numbers of women, leading to action by politicians.

It won't be all me doing it. That's my vision, that ultimately we could have a ten million women march. If not on Washington, on every

city hall in every state of the nation, certainly every capitol of the nation. I think it would get their attention. I think it is doable. Don't you?

Quan Yin's actions and leadership with this issue were sparked by her indignation at what she deemed injustice. As she discussed it, her voiced rose in excitement.

I hate being made a fool. We are so being lied to and so denigrated and so used and misused. We women have allowed it. Shown [men] how. I think it's just time to show them how not to. I think of my granddaughter, my daughter, me, you!

Her actions as a leader make her a role model for other women. But when asked about her own role models, she noted that her role models and ideas about life came from books. "I didn't have a model but I had great literature and people with high ideals and a world that was so much bigger than the world I was being raised in that it gave me a whole different perspective on what was possible." Ever the questioner of authority, as a child Quan Yin made it a point to read the books her church told her not to read. "When they announced what the books were that we were not supposed to read, that's the book I went out and got. Because I knew it was going to be good." She read everything she could get her hands on by Ayn Rand and other strong women, for example.

Quan Yin admitted that Oprah Winfrey was a hero for her at the time of the interview. "I see her as a catalyst for change and a tremendous overcomer. Black, female, overweight in this culture. And none of it stopped her." Although

the obstacles to overcome were not exactly the same, Quan Yin's description of Oprah sounded much like one would use to describe Quan Yin herself.

When asked if Quan Yin thought of herself as a leader, she quickly responded affirmatively. "Yeah, because I always am. If I join a club, I end up being the president. I guess people feel they can trust me." Her view of herself had changed as she aged. She was more comfortable with who she was, less self-effacing, more able to own and acknowledge her skills and talents. She admitted that even in her forties, the inferiority complex from which she had suffered in childhood was "probably still operating. But not anymore!"

It was a near-death experience following surgery in her forties that begun the process of "dismantl[ing] the compulsion to over-achieve and changed that to succeeding because of things I *choose* to do that I feel are meaningful to me." She began studying her dreams, a practice she still followed with her dream interpretation group, took classes in parapsychology and psychology, and began Jungian therapy. "I started waking up. I don't tend to be such a people-pleaser. I've actually established some pretty good boundaries and [went] from being rather a compulsive people pleaser to being ...a successful adult in a crazy world."

When that she found herself in old age, people told her to slow down and asked when she was going to retire. She claimed she would *never* retire. "I don't know what would be fun about that." Her advice to other old women to whom it is suggested to slow down or retire was "to get over it and get on with something that makes them feel alive. I think of life as a school and I want to learn as much

as I can this time around. And I would like to leave it better than I found it.” To Quan Yin, old age is just a label that does not fit her. To her, old age “is when you stop doing. At any age. When you have no particular interest in anything but your own self, you might just as well curl up and leave the planet.”

Quan Yin’s zest for life was evident. She exuded an optimism and a positive attitude. Her expression of gratitude for her many blessings indicated a life of lessons learned, of personal growth and acceptance of the gifts of life’s challenges.

What do I look forward to? Everyday. It’s always so interesting, there’s just always something happening that you don’t expect and there’s always something new. I think life is so remarkable.

Interestingly, even though Quan Yin spoke throughout the interview of her less than ideal childhood and her bouts with ill health, when specifically asked to do so, she was unable to name obstacles she had had to overcome in her life. In fact, the only obstacle she could point to was the political system she was working to change. But in speaking of that system, she became even more animated. Her emotional tone rose and I could feel what seemed like a lifetime of stored frustration.

I think the thing I really hate the most is hypocrisy. I saw so much of it growing up. And I just hated it. I couldn’t have put my finger on it but I knew so much of it was just pretense. It just wasn’t heartfelt and, to me, what really counts is that which is heartfelt.

It is her heartfelt desire to “add to the planet” that propels Quan Yin forward in her work and in her leadership efforts on behalf of rape victims. This desire is born from her gratitude for her blessings. “I have to feel like I am adding value. Because I am *getting* value so it’s got to be reciprocal.” She has always been one to tackle large problems. She described them as “the windmills I have been tilting at all my life. You know, I have been a Don Quixote type. I know it’s a type. Some of us do good, and others sit back and let us do it.”

At the end of the interview, although the tape was turned off, we continued to talk. While talking about teaching our children about self-confidence, Quan Yin commented that it was a shame most of us don’t achieve our true self-confidence until we get older. She spoke of a friend who, in teaching her twelve-year-old son about the key to success in life, explained that there are two ways to walk into a room. One is to say, “here I am” and call attention to yourself. The other is to say to the people already in the room, “Oh, there you are!” Quan Yin commented on the difference it makes to let people know one is interested in them. That interest in other people and the caring displayed in the second method of walking into a room described Quan Yin. It was her confidence to be outside herself, to have a deep and genuine interest in others, to make others feel at home, welcomed and important, that brought her to and through many of her life experiences and contributed to her ability to continue to be a leader in old age.

At the start of the interview, I asked if there was a pseudonym she would like me to use for her. At first she said she couldn’t think of anything other than “Honey Bunny.” By the end of the interview she asked to be called Quan Yin, a

Chinese goddess of love and compassion. She noted that in her travels, she had, quite unconsciously, collected several statues and paintings of Quan Yin. In an interesting sense, both Honey Bunny and Quan Yin are similar. Both carry connotations of love and compassion and softness. But by the end of the interview, Quan Yin's self-confidence became more manifest, much as she had described its evolution during her life. Both pseudonyms depicted her basic personality as she saw it, but the original name mirrored her early life. By the end of the interview, the name she chose for herself represented an image of strength and power, reflecting her growth in confidence and as she aged.

Summary

In this chapter, demographic information on the participants was presented along with a partial list of their activities pertaining to leadership in old age. The women were introduced to the reader through individual stories designed to acquaint the reader with the circumstances, context and decisions that led to their becoming leaders in old age.

In Chapter Five, the analysis of narrative is presented. It is in this chapter that the themes and concepts that emerged from the data are analyzed.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE

In the first phase of data analysis presented in Chapter Four, each of the nine participants was treated as a single case study, resulting in individual stories. These stories were offered as background data to the themes surrounding their leadership in old age. The stories delineated their history and described the circumstances surrounding their leadership endeavors at this stage of their lives. The second phase of data analysis, the analysis of narrative, constituted a cross-case analysis, which will be presented in this chapter. In the process of the analysis of narrative, transcripts and field notes from all nine participants were analyzed as a whole with an eye to constructs that emerged as common across the women's stories. Certainly one would not necessarily expect to see all of these ideas or topics in each and every case. But there were key ideas and topics running through the data as a whole that became clear as the analysis proceeded. These are presented here in the form of themes from which summaries and conclusions are drawn in Chapter Six.

On the basis of findings from the preliminary study and initial literature review, I anticipated that themes such as support systems, involvement to help others achieve goals, and positive feelings about old age might be relevant categories useful for initial coding. While no attempt was made to impose coding on the transcript data that could not support those categories, as it turned out,

they did indeed continue as themes in the full study, although not always in the way that had been anticipated.

The predominant themes from the total group of transcribed interviews are as follows:

1. The importance of education and life-long learning, values that served as foundations for much of their life experiences, opening avenues and opportunities to achieve, develop and display leadership.
2. A history of personal and professional achievement based on the skills, talents and characteristics that served as a template for their leadership in old age.
3. Strong support systems to back them in their endeavors and from which to draw emotional strength.
4. A lifetime history of giving support to others, a characteristic that often opened the door for them to their present leadership pursuits.
5. Strong positive attitudes, willingness to try new ventures and a persistence to overcome obstacles
6. Definite opinions about the importance of remaining productive and active in old age. These themes will be highlighted in the following analysis.

Theme 1. Education/Lifelong Learners

All of the women in the study held as a value the importance of higher education. For some, this value was implicit in their childhood homes and families. For others, the expression of this value was overt and the influence of

early family life on the formation of these values revealed itself in many of the life stories. For example, both Felicia and Ruby were the granddaughters of slaves who impressed on their families the great importance of and esteem with which they held education, involvement, and achievement. These two women, along with all the others in the study, grew up with the expectation that they would attend college, not necessarily as a result of social privilege but because of family values regarding the necessity and merit of education as a prerequisite for success in life. With these expectations and values in mind, it is not surprising that, atypical of their cohort, these women were highly educated and accomplished professional women in their own right far before reaching old age. Three of the nine held doctorate degrees. One had a master's degree. All but one completed their undergraduate education with a degree and the one exception had more than enough credits to graduate but not enough for a specific degree in any one subject.

Because of their education, the women were able to find work and careers that led them to a variety of experiences and opened the doors to opportunities that, in some cases, led to the leadership activities they pursued in old age. The skills they developed in jobs and careers were later called upon in their leadership activities. For example, Mary Elizabeth's career and her experience and talents gained in opening schools led her to being asked to help found the orphanage. Ann's career as a teacher helped her in her experience as president of a large organization for teachers and her innovative management style as a principal was a forerunner to her developing and teaching workshops for

teachers around the state while she served as president of the organization. The skills necessary for Felicia's work developing policies in the State Senior Legislature can be traced to her project evaluation jobs earlier in life.

In addition to pursuing formal education early in their lives, the women in the study were lifelong learners as well. Their educations did not stop with college courses or specific degrees. At the time of our interview, 82-year-old Ruby was enrolled in two classes at her local community college. Ann, who spent 20 years taking college classes before achieving her Ph.D., talked of taking classes with her husband for another ten years as they planned their retirement. "About 10 years before [our retirement] my husband and I would take these classes ... about insurance, health insurance, what it is that you would do with your time, and stuff like that. And general financial kinds of things."

When Quan Yin took on her job as a director of development at a nonprofit agency, she had no previous professional experience specific to that area. Because she felt she had much to learn in order to do the best job, she enrolled in classes to gain expertise. "I took several classes in grant writing and on development and all the rest of it and it has been a learning curve like this ever since."

Lifelong learning continued for some even without formal classes. Recall Sylvia's comment about her childhood,

I always had a book. I still do. There is a lot of learning I still have to do. The one thing I would hope for both for young and old is that we

recognize that we are learning all the time and it doesn't stop whether you are 99 or nine.

Theme 2. Achievement

Early Successes and Peak Experiences: About half of the women recalled specific experiences in their childhoods or early adulthoods that foreshadowed their leadership in old age. Their life stories were replete with examples of personal achievement, including academic excellence, some formal recognition for outstanding achievements, and prior recognition of their leadership abilities through election to leadership positions in various organizations throughout their lives. Many of the women qualified for and were given scholarships and other academic awards, even in a time when women were not necessarily rewarded or encouraged in academia.

Some of these early incidences of personal achievement began as early as childhood or young adulthood. For example, Louise won an essay contest for the Temperance League recognizing her writing skills at the age of 10. As a young Brownie leader and Boy Scout leader (for which she volunteered prior to having children of her own), her enthusiasm and creativity won awards for her troops. She recalled, "I dressed up [the Cub Scouts] as Indians and went down to the downtown Auditorium. And our exhibit won a prize because it was just different from what everyone else was doing!" Louise noted in the interview that she carried the enthusiasm and the enjoyment of achievement from that time in her life forward to the present, to the volunteer work she does now for a law enforcement agency. Ann, too, had successes in her young adult life as a

volunteer Scout leader and she, too, received awards for the creative activities she brought to her troops. Her involvement and her achievements with the troops led her to become the youngest troop leader and the head of Leader's Council by the time she was 21.

Personal achievements highlight the women's lives into old age as well. At the time of our interviews, Ann was president of two organizations and Ruby was on the board or serving as an officer of five organizations in which she participated. Sylvia, who served on three boards at the time of the interview, earned a Silver Medal in swimming in the Senior Olympics while in her seventies. At the age of 82, Muriel was awarded a grant to create an art exhibit featuring her own creation and art form. The award was given in recognition of her contribution to both the art world and women's history as the exhibit features an "homage to exceptional women in the arts." Both Louise and Sylvia were nominated to be in the first City Women's Hall of Fame in 2001.

Career: According to their life stories, all of the women in this study worked outside of the home throughout their lifetimes and each woman in the study had a history of success in her chosen professional career. In a cohort in which the societal norm for women was to stay home and not work outside the home, it is significant that these women in the study had jobs and careers throughout their lives, some out of financial necessity, some solely because of personal choice.

While one might expect a variety of profession and job choices in any group of women today, the job and career choices available to this cohort of

women was limited by the social constraints of the time in which they came of age. (For those of us over a certain age, we can still remember "Want Ads" in newspapers separated into jobs for males and jobs for females.) Teaching, nursing, social services, and clerical positions were the most prevalent of the options available for professional women and the women in this study fell within this framework. Sylvia recalled,

I went very traditionally, in my first years. By traditionally, I mean what was I going to do to earn a living. First I wanted to go to college. I thought maybe I would be a nurse, maybe I would do this, maybe I would do that, but you have to earn a living and we didn't have much money so I did the clerical thing. I was first a file clerk and then a Dictaphone operator and then I got a job, I took some test for civil service and I got a job as a secretary.

In fact, after college, Sylvia did find jobs in social services.

As it turns out, seven of the nine women were involved at some point in their lives in teaching and/or in educational administration. Four of the women actively sought out education as their chosen field of work. The others came by the field through other means at various stages of their lives. For example, Muriel began her work life by developed a business selling fabrics, first from her home and later from a barn she rented to house her growing business. In addition, however, desiring alternative education for her children, Muriel founded, taught and hired teachers for an alternative school. Ruby worked her entire lifetime as an accountant but found herself teaching senior classes in her 80's. Sylvia

worked as a teacher early in her career and again after her husband died in 1971. Then, after years of social service work, she again found herself teaching, in courses she devised for older women while she herself was in her 80s.

Like Sylvia, other women in the study also experienced career changes, some of them significant. Muriel, Felicia, and Quan Yin underwent the most dramatic career shifts throughout their lives, beginning in one field or business and moving to another involving quite different areas of expertise. Muriel, for example, began a retail business in her young adulthood. She moved to the field of education, as noted above, almost simultaneously. But it was in her middle age that she began in earnest the career in which she remained at the time of our interview: as an artist.

Quan Yin began her career in real estate, moving into interior design almost by default as a result of her interest in buying and selling homes herself. However, in middle age (approximately age 55), she began volunteering at a children's shelter. After six years of dedication to the shelter, she was asked to become its Director of Development, a "total career change" as she noted, from real estate, and a change for which she had to begin at the beginning to learn how to perform. In fact, after taking on the job, she began educating herself about how to do her job, by taking classes in development, grant writing and more.

Felicia began her work life in a civil service job. While she had been educated and trained as a teacher with the intent of working in that profession, the city in which she lived was not hiring teachers because of the lack of wages

available during the Depression. So Felicia took a job with the Selective Service. After marrying and moving while her husband was in the military service, she and her family returned to her hometown where she was hired as a social worker supervising caseworkers for foster care programs. Years later, Felicia shifted her career slightly, serving as a social service program evaluator for the Lutheran Church.

Sylvia worked most of her life at a variety of social work jobs but also noted that she had been a teacher throughout her life too. In fact, she had taught students of all ages, from toddlers in “nursery schools,” to young adults to those in old age for whom she provided writing classes.

Although the other five women changed jobs or relocated for either personal or family reasons to various cities throughout the country, they remained in jobs in their areas of professional concentration. Ann and Mary Elizabeth were both teachers who also ran schools for which they had developed and implemented new and innovative ideas. Donna taught for many years in a unique program, offered by the park and recreation system that took advantage of her knowledge and expertise of nature as well as her training as a teacher. Louise worked throughout her professional career as a community college professor. Ruby worked, until she officially medically retired, as a civil service accountant.

Regardless of the profession in which they began or ended up, the women in the study brought love, caring and passion to their work and moved up their professional ladders through their hard work, creativity, and persistence, values

they learned through both positive and negative examples in childhood. These characteristics were then carried with them into old age and to their leadership activities. The endeavors in which they found themselves in old age played upon those traits and also allowed these women to use their creativity in new and untried ways. It is the patterns of a lifetime that appeared to follow them into their old age and that colored the activities and the attitudes with which they dealt with their lives at this stage.

Theme 3. Support *from* Others

The overarching feeling one gets when talking to this group of women is that they are all strong, grounded women who have enjoyed what life has brought them as well as what they have been able to give back to life. They project a touching sense of humble self-confidence. It is clear that, while they believe in their own abilities, they are aware of and grateful for others' influence in their lives. It is notable that most have received and continue to receive strong emotional support from others. Some of this support was received by virtue of belonging to a family or a particular community. For example, Ruby spoke at length of the support and encouragement she received from her sister. Felicia's two sons have been a source of emotional support, as have the children of many of the other women. Aunts, grandmothers, and mothers played special and important roles as mentors and sources of support.

In addition to the support of their families, several of the women in the study developed other support systems as well. For example, Mary Elizabeth's religious community was a source of emotional support throughout her life. Other

support systems were actively sought out by the women who found or created groups with whom they could relate and from whom they drew strength. For example, after Quan Yin's near-death experience, she founded a Dream Interpretation group, with whom she still met regularly after 20 years. Louise belonged to a sewing group who met regularly to sew and to discuss and support one another through life's events. Donna's bead group functioned in much the same way and was also a source of traveling companions for her since her husband did not share her love of travel. Louise discussed the importance of these groups for the emotional health of the women involved. "Absolutely no psychiatry can ever take the place of a group of friends who meet with a common project, sit there, unload everything that is on their minds and discuss it, find a resolution for it, [and] fix all the problems of the world."

It was with the help of their strong support systems of friends, family and community that many of the women in the study flourished not just personally but also professionally and continued to expand on their professions, skills, and talents well into old age. Mary Elizabeth had a supportive community within her church both during her childhood and all her adult life as a Catholic nun. In addition, she continued to receive professional support from her university colleagues and job that not only allowed but also encouraged her to take the time from her professional duties to pursue her work with the orphanage she helped to found. She noted with gratitude, "the University has been wonderful about letting me set my own schedule, etc. And they couldn't be more supportive." Anne, too, had both a personal and professional support system. Anne's husband and

daughter both supported her in her endeavors. She observed, "I get positive feedback from my husband. Coming in contact with [my husband] was wonderful because he believed in me. I have a daughter [who is] just wonderful. And she encourages me." In addition, through her efforts, Anne strategically built a strong network of support within her professional organization.

I was going all over the state [presenting workshops] and I built a cadre of strong supporters. From them, I picked my leaders. I didn't even know these people until I went to the workshop and I'd say, "Oh I gotta remember so and so," and I'd pick him as maybe a state chairman of a committee. And people would say, "How did you know that?" And I would say, "I saw him in action and that's the kind of person I wanted on *my* team."

Support from family and/or professional colleagues was noted in all the women's life stories, from early on in their careers to the time of our interviews with respect to their leadership activities in old age. Some made conscious and deliberate decisions with their family about whether or not to undertake the leadership endeavors they chose in old age. Louise's present husband was so supportive of her work with the Law Enforcement Agency that he decided to join her in her efforts. Ann noted that she and her husband discussed the six-year commitment required if she became president of her organization.

My husband and I had a really long talk about it. There [would] be calls. It would be disruptive. Would we be willing to have that in our lives? It took a lot because there [were] a lot of calls, a lot of

communication. The fax machine was hot all the time. Was this what we wanted for ourselves? So we decided, yeah, we could handle it.

Donna, too, specifically noted the support of her husband regarding her community service work. She smiled as she said, "My husband says he does his civic duty by contributing me." Like Ann, Donna discussed with her family her desire to give her time to her leadership activities outside of the home in order to ensure their support before taking on the commitment of time and energy that would be required of her. She recalled,

The kids [and my husband had] to learn to live with the whims of the city council ... Sometimes you are not there to fix dinner or pick somebody up from school or take them somewhere and things like that. The rest of the family was all very good about accepting that. Because we sat down and we talked about if I was going to get involved in this, that it would make a change in our family's life and if it was important to them, then I would feel like I could do it. If it wasn't important to them, then there would be a problem. And so we all agreed that it was important.

Ruby recalled the support and encouragement of family and friends. In fact, the encouragement of her sister and a good friend were the impetus for Ruby's community activities following her medical retirement.

This neighbor of mine found out I had retired on a disability. I told her, "I am sick and disabled. That's how come I retired." [She said],

“Well, you get up and do something that will help you.” She dragged me out into everything.

It was her sister who first got Ruby involved in political activism and from that first involvement Ruby has never wavered. Her first foray into the political and community action arena in which she became an active leader came as a direct result of her sister asking her to help in a campaign in which she believed. Later, her sister kept Ruby involved.

My sister discouraged me from quitting when I did. She said, “Don’t quit, don’t quit, you are going miss it, you are going to miss it.” ... We did a lot of learning a lot about national politics. It was tremendously interesting, just the two of us here. We would run up and down the hall. We stayed up all night long!

Some were encouraged by others, others were pushed, but all found the support, encouragement and inspiration of other women important factors in their lives. The women in the study spoke of strong women, including their mothers, grandmothers, aunts or friends, who mentored, role modeled and taught them in their childhoods. Louise, for example, had the support in childhood of her maternal grandparents with whom she lived and her aunt, about whom she spoke:

My aunt was eleven years older than I was. I would follow her every place and I am amazed at her tolerance now. I worshiped her. She was my closest confidant, my best friend, my mentor. She would always encourage me. I think she was the epitome of perfection.

She just had an elegant air about her that everything she did was precisely and almost perfectly done. She was the one who encouraged me and insisted that I could improve my grades and that if I could get a satisfactory, I most certainly could get an excellent. She was the motivation behind my efforts to excel at whatever I did. Felicia, too, had a much-older sister who served as her mentor, role model and teacher.

My second sister never had children but she was an "Auntie Mame." [She] always took any niece or nephew to Washington, D.C. for spring vacation when they were ten years old. She felt we needed to learn about our history and that was her way of expressing it. So that was a good way of establishing pride in our country and our history.

Strong mothers were mentioned by many of the women as having an influence on them from early childhood. Most spoke of their mothers as a positive influence and role model for female strength and resilience. Felicia recalled her mother's strength the day her father died:

Mother was a very strong, strong personality and I can remember her calling us together to help us understand what death would mean.

We were a family who believed in education and achieving and upward mobility. My mother let all of us know that she wanted us to achieve.

The stories of two women stood out as apart from the rest, however, in terms of using their mothers as negative examples for their own behavior both in childhood and even to the present.

Although Louise's grandmother was a positive role model and taught her the value of history and doing one's best, throughout her life Louise would use her mother's behaviors as a model for what not to do in her own life.

My mother was a hypochondriac and every letter she ever wrote to me was, "I am going to die any minute." And of course my heart was just crushed. I thought, "Oh, my poor, poor mother." She lived to be 89. ...Even though I knew when I was 23 years old that I had cancer, I wouldn't tell anyone other than my husband. He had to know it because he was the one that took me to the dispensary and to the hospital for the surgery. But I will never make my children suffer the way she laid this trip on me that you are going to lose me. Her whole life revolved around her latest ache or pain. I do not put my children through that. I do not put my friends through that. They are going to see only the best that I have to offer, which is usually a smile and a funny story and a "How are you doing today?"

Quan Yin noted that she had no positive role models in her childhood. She spoke of her mother as a negative role model, noting,

She will be 90 next month. Still very alert and still very self-centered - *extremely* self-centered. The world essentially revolves her and so I

did a lot of people pleasing and cheerleading and that was my way of getting the attention.

But Quan Yin found her childhood role models in books.

I would read, hours and hours until they came home. I didn't have a [role] model but I had great literature and people with high ideals and a world that was so much bigger than the world I was being raised in that it gave me a whole different perspective on what was possible.

Today Quan Yin cites Oprah Winfrey as her role model. The words the women used to describe their role models reflect their own passions, goals, and aspirations, as well as some of the challenges they feel they have faced and overcome themselves.

I think she has a real sense of justice and fair play and a spiritual base that is not religious and [a sense] that we are only here a brief time and there's a reason for it and let's find out what our particular reason is and get on with it. And I see her as a catalyst for change and tremendous overcomer: black, female, overweight in this culture. Think of it! And none of it stopped her.

Ann's first mentor was a high school teacher who got her involved in Girl Scouting. " She was a good model for me to follow – very organized and knew what she was going to do and did it and there was a lot of happiness associated with whatever we did in that group." Her mentor in old age was a former teacher who was a catalyst for her present leadership work. She described her: "She's a

few years older than I am. [She showed me] the steps to follow if you are interested in leadership and, unbeknownst, she was pushing me in this way.”

Donna spoke long and lovingly of neighbors “who showed me all the internal workings of living things of animals, at quite a tender age” and who “took me on wonderful expeditions. She was the nature writer [with a] sense of adventure and exploration in all parts of the world. I thought, man that’s the life for me!” Donna also mentioned Jane Goodall as a wonderful role model whom she heard speak and from whom she learned to “think, globally but act locally and that had sort of been my way but, really fortified it for me.”

Sylvia recalled her mother as a source of strength and a role model who had “a strength of character and purpose and she set an example. My dad died and she carried on in such a strong and able way with the rest of us. She was the one who was in some ways the strength of the family.”

Importantly, Sylvia’s mother gave her a gift far beyond the strength of character she showed for her family. Her mother’s love was a source of strength and a foundation on which she was able to build the accomplishments of her own life. She spoke in her interview of having something that a lot of the children with whom she worked in her social work career did not have and acknowledged that the something was an asset for which she was grateful: “I knew I was loved and that it was always there for me. That [gave] me the ability to give love.”

While her mother gave her the support from which to build her life, Sylvia also spoke of her role model for old age.

She is 95. She was working as a volunteer [for both Planned Parenthood and the Peace Resource Center] from the time she was 80 until 90. She was driving, she was doing everything, and she was a person who made no judgments and who was very caring. It's like what I hope to do but she really was a model for it.

Armed with the examples and support of their families, mentors or role models, these women were able to attempt activities and service that they might not have been free, able or willing to pursue had their commitments to more traditional endeavors been less flexible, less cooperative or less encouraging.

Theme 4. Support to Others: The Importance of Involvement and Participation

Many of the women learned from their families, early in their childhoods, of the importance of involvement and participation in making a difference in their communities. For example, Felicia's pull toward political activism "was a natural. My grandfather on my mother's side had been a slave and I can remember grandpa telling us about [how] his childhood experiences had helped him realize the importance of being involved in the politics around there."

Sylvia recounted her mother's strength and the lessons learned from her about the importance of standing up for others who were less advantaged. It was a natural progression, then, for Sylvia to become an advocate, supporter and educator of those whose voices were less than recognized or heeded. Early experiences foreshadowed her later endeavors. Even as a teenager, she took on both volunteer and paid positions helping children and adults, including those in old age to better their lives. Throughout these experiences she stood up for

equality and justice and stood up against intolerance. In one of her first social service jobs as a young adult, she saw evidence of bigotry against which she took a personal stand.

I saw a lot of people who were discriminated against - Black teenagers who, when I brought them into a restaurant, were not treated well and of course, ... my feelings about that made me speak up. And I said, "You are serving *two* people who are here to get a meal!"

Sylvia's compassion and willingness to stand up for others is a life-long quality. She spoke of her sister who had Alzheimer's disease and for whom she was a caretaker for a couple years. That experience, she said, validated "how fortunate I am to be where I am" and that "we have to fight for [those who are not as fortunate] too."

Quan Yin's experiences with a disabled brother taught her compassion for others, lessons hard-won at the expense of bumps and bruises from physical fights with other children in defense of her sibling. She recalled feeling "pretty defensive for him."

I think that having a brother or sibling that was needy or weak made me very acutely compassionate to people who have difficulties.

Because it really hurt me to see him get hurt.

The women's compassion and desire to help others was a challenge for them when circumstances left them feeling helpless. When asked about the obstacles she had faced in her life, Louise, who had faced deaths and

abandonment by loved ones, her own multiple diagnoses of cancer, and many other challenges, any one of which might stop many of us, sighed heavily and spoke of her son. "He has been in and out of mental health facilities for over 20 years. If I could change anything, I would try to make his life better."

Whether because of learned family values regarding the importance of participation and involvement or because of an innate nature to be involved in their world and to be of service to others, for the women in this study, "sitting back" would be an anathema. As a group, these were women who made things happen. When they saw needs, they found ways to fill them. When they saw opportunities, they took them. When there was a need without an opportunity, they created one. For example, both Sylvia and Muriel were unsatisfied with the educational opportunities available for their children. Interestingly, both women created schools for their own children as well as others. Sylvia spoke of the experience: "I wanted my children to have that opportunity [to go to nursery school] so I started a couple of nursery schools and I taught in them and I got other people to do the teaching and I kind of organized it."

The women in this study did not wait for others to do for them; they did not settle for the way things are or always have been. They had the courage to do for themselves and others. As Ruby said, "Every one of us has a unique position to accomplish in this life. This is what God put you here for"

History of Volunteerism: Several of the participants were adamant about the value of involvement and volunteerism. Their comments on this subject were often heated and vehement. Ruby's statement was the most direct but

exemplified their passion, as a group, for the importance of participating in the activities of life when she said, "The only thing that I deplore is people who don't get involved in things." But Ruby was not alone in her sentiment. Ann recalled, "When I look upon these people that don't participate, I get discouraged. They sit back. I call them the great evaluators." Although some came to it later than others, all of the women in the study were active volunteers, some all their lives and all for at least the last decade to three decades of their lives. In fact, the leadership activity in which the women found themselves in old age was, for every woman in the study, performed as a volunteer.

Helping Others Meet Their Needs/Goals: Interestingly, most of the women in the study did not actively seek the area of activity in which they found themselves as leaders in old age. They were often invited to participate in the particular activity by others who turned to them for support or encouraged them to be part of a dream held by others who sought their help. With life histories of offering support to others, these requests were met with positive responses and the positive responses led to opportunities and opened doors that were often life changing. For Louise, for example, what started as a request by a friend to produce a couple historical fashion shows depicting the city's history led to over a thousand shows for over a million people from all over the state and almost ten thousand items of clothing and accessories, the largest private collection of historical fashions in the western half of the United States. Louise thought back about the sequence of events that began with a simple request and her

willingness to lend a hand. "The thing that changed my entire life was two words: I'll help."

Having entered the situations in this way, with the intention of helping someone else and not for themselves, they whole-heartedly gave their wisdom, experience and creativity to the projects on which they served. From there, their activities expanded to the level of commitment at which they found themselves at the time of our interviews or about which they reminisced.

The notable exception to this was Felicia who sought out the meeting on the formation of the her state Senior Legislature and who actively pursued inclusion as a candidate. But for the others, their initial forays into the areas in which they found their leadership in old age, came about as a result of their willingness to say yes to another human being's call for help, their willingness to step forward, without pay, and in most cases, without recognition or acknowledgment to aid another and to make a difference in their world.

Theme 5. Positive Attitudes

Optimistic Outlook on Life: It was their enthusiasm and enjoyment of life that overshadowed any obstacles encountered so far by the women in the study. They expressed a love of life and a love for their lifelong professions as well as their present leadership endeavors that rang with enthusiasm and vitality. Mary Elizabeth stated, "It's been my years [with the orphanage that have been my most joyful]. ...I love doing it! I really do! ...But ...I really loved what I was doing before." Anne's joyful recollection of her years in education mirrored Mary Elizabeth's. In addition, she looked back on her 20 years as a student with the

same sense of enthusiasm as she stated, "I always loved being a student!"

Partly, the women had chosen activities they enjoyed (and as one woman put it, they had the freedom to leave activities they did not enjoy). Partly, however, one gets the feeling that these women had learned to enjoy life and had cultivated a positive attitude. Quan Yin said, "I think I was just born with a pretty happy disposition and when I was happy I was really happy."

"I Can Do This": However, more than just having a general positive outlook, the women in the study expressed a self-confidence, a belief in their ability to do what was asked of them and what they asked of themselves, even if they had not done anything like it before. Perhaps, the confidence created the positive attitude or perhaps, as Felicia noted, the reverse was true. "I have a really positive outlook about my experiences. It is because I had a certain self-confidence that I could handle it, that I could do it."

Louise spoke of several instances in her life in which she literally told herself, "I can do it." When she thought about becoming a teacher, when she tried to enlist in the Navy at age 16, when a friend was looking for Brownie leaders and approached her (even though she was only 20 years old and had no children) to volunteer, Louise thought, "I can help. I can do this." Whether or not they articulated the words literally as did Felicia and Louise, all of the women exuded a confidence in their abilities to master new or difficult situations.

"If Not Me, Who Will Do This?": In trying or even fearful circumstances, determination and confidence kept the women in action and in service. That, and a sense of obligation to serve as a role model for others, a sense that they

should not expect others to do what they were unwilling to do. Sylvia spoke of her work at a women's shelter at which the angry husbands or boyfriends of the women staying at the shelter would sometimes arrive with guns. I asked if she had been fearful or had wanted to leave the situation. She replied,

Why would I even be working there if I didn't have enough guts to deal with whatever you have to deal with? And not only that, if I go, then will someone else be so fearful that they will go? So you have to set a little bit of a role model for the others.

Quan Yin, too, found the courage to face what she described as horrendous circumstances when she realized that "if everybody who saw the need ran from it because it afflicted them that way, how would it ever change?" Donna spoke of taking back the work at the nature center because others had been unwilling or unable to do a good job of keeping it going. And, indeed part of her motivation for staying as long as she had and for developing the educational outreach program was to cultivate others who would take action. But, in the meantime, she was willing to do what others were not for a cause in which she believed.

Ruby explained her belief that her life served a unique purpose. To her, being of service was an obligation she felt she must meet. She stated, "If you don't do it, it's not going to get done. You are the only person who can do what God put you here to do. Nobody else can do it."

Willingness to Try New Ventures: While some of the women presented some initial resistance to their current pursuits, they all had a history of trying

new things, going to new places and doing what needed to be done to overcome obstacles in order to accomplish what they set out to do. As Sylvia said, "I have always been curious to try things." Anne's innovativeness throughout her career continued into her current presidency. Her lack of fear has allowed her to enjoy new experiences she might otherwise have missed. She recalled,

I went to Africa. I didn't know a soul. I just went up and met somebody in Los Angeles...and we linked with two other women. We went for 30 days on a safari and *loved* it. And another time I went to Europe. Same thing.

Mary Elizabeth, too, was unafraid to go to a new place and or to tackle a new task. When approached by the priest who asked her to help him, she had never been to the country to which she was asked to travel and had no experience with medical facilities, let alone the establishment of an entire hospital. But she was able to overcome uncertainty and see the potential for good. She stated, "I had no idea whether I could stand it or not because I didn't know anything about the place. [But] I was just captivated by the people. We have so much to do [for] these people."

Overcomer of Obstacles: All of the women in the study met obstacles to their success and, indeed, obstacles throughout their lives that they overcame with dignity, honor, courage and humor. Certainly one could say that being a woman in the times in which they were born was an obstacle to some successes. For example, Donna spoke of the effect of being a woman immediately following World War II on her ability to gain entry into college:

Just as I was graduating from high school, all the veterans were coming back from World War II and the colleges were loathe to deny them. So even though I had very good grades, a nice high Regents score, which was the state writing exam, I had a terrible time getting into college.

The women also ran into other obstacles as a result of their gender. Ann, for example, spoke of the reticence of the men in her organization to listen to the women involved. "The men hate our guts. We're criticized because we do too much. They've singled out all the smart women."

Two of the women ran into double prejudice. Felicia spoke of the ongoing racial prejudice she met.

Now and then I would have an experience that would suggest the individual who was trying to impose upon me was limited in their capabilities to understand the background and the history of this Black woman. It still sets up a series of questions for me as to why after all these years [people] have not understood that there are ways in which [they] see me and it's really a disadvantage for [them].

Ruby spoke of the same prejudice acknowledged early in life and because of which certain life decisions were made. She noted her disillusionment when she discovered as a child that the churches in Washington, DC were segregated. "I was shocked when I went to Washington because I thought, 'This was the nation's capitol; there's no segregation here.' Believe me, there is." Throughout her life, her skin color allowed her to discover much about human nature.

It's difficult. As soon as you walk in [to a meeting, people say, "You must be Mrs. Smith." Of course, I am Mrs. Smith. You know they said "this Black lady" and here I am. People don't realize how much they give away with statements.

As they grew older, prejudices about age became an added obstacle. At the age of 60, with children still to support in college, Sylvia set off from her home in the Midwest to find a new home in a warmer climate. On deciding to settle in Southern California, she attempted to find a job.

I had realized that because of my age, the getting of that first job was really tough. I was getting a lot of discrimination. There is no other word for it. Even though I was careful to let them know that I had the qualifications. But there was no question in my mind that first there was ageism and then there was also sexism and all of that interfered with my getting work more quickly.

But, as with other obstacles, prejudices against race or age or gender spurred these women to action. It was the prejudice against her age that spurred Sylvia to look into the Older Women's League with whom she became an active leader in her old age. It was, in fact, the prejudice of skin color that spurred Felicia to step up and speak out at the planning meeting of the California Senior Legislature. It was the prejudice against the women leaders in her organization that spurred Ann to organize the women into a successful coalition.

We're going back into our divisions and we're becoming presidents of the organization and then we're going [back] to the convention. ...

The group is getting larger and larger. They're gonna have *trouble* with us.

It is this sense of commitment and willingness to do what is necessary to achieve a goal that appears to have served the women in their ability to overcome obstacles. Anne faced political obstacles in her presidency. Mary Elizabeth's work in the country where the orphanage is located involved political obstacles of a different kind. She often has to deal with US and other government agencies, crossing international borders to remove red tape so that the children she served could receive needed services or become adopted. She has arranged for children to receive special medical care in the US and has overcome immigration obstacles to allow many Haitian orphans to be adopted by US families. She "moved Heaven and Earth down there" in order to serve the children she had grown to love.

Beyond overcoming the prejudices of race and gender and age, the women in the study all met and dealt with the sometimes overwhelming challenges of life including health problems and the loss of loved ones due to death or divorce. Six of the nine women faced or continue to face significant, life-threatening health issues. Quan Yin spoke of a near-death experience some 20 years prior to the interview. But she had faced other medical emergencies in her life as well. In fact, Quan Yin, Louise, Donna, and Ruby were all cancer survivors. While Ruby's lung cancer diagnosis did not come until she was 80, Louise's first diagnosis occurred at age 23 and she had faced recurrences of the cancer at the time of the interview. All four of these women faced additional

medical problems prior to and after the cancer diagnoses. Ruby had been medically retired due to other medical conditions while she was in her 50's. Quan Yin continued to face debilitating pain from polymyalgia rheumatica. Donna had dealt with lupus since she was in her mid-thirties and had cataract surgery the week prior to our interview. Louise had been recently diagnosed with a heart problem as well. None of these conditions appeared to preclude these women's leadership activities, nor did the medical conditions that did or had affected Felicia (head trauma from an automobile accident) or Muriel (a heart condition). Rather than using health problems as an excuse to do less, the women in the study carried on in spite of them.

In addition to possible health problems, one might expect those in old age to experience losses of loved ones. The expectation of loss does not negate the profound impact or lessen its sorrow. But for some of the women, their losses occurred well before their old age and may have served as a catalyst for action. The death of Sylvia's husband when she was just past 50, prompted her to return to teaching and to find other areas of work to support her children. While Louise had and continued to face overwhelming health challenges, she claimed that the biggest obstacle she faced in her life was the abandonment of her and her six children by her first husband. She was forced to do for herself and to learn things in order to care for her children and home that many women do not attempt. "Of a necessity, I learned how to do things I never thought I would have to learn to do. Plumbing, electrical wiring, repairing, painting, all the things that go into keeping a home running."

The women in the study have all faced the death of loved ones such as parents or spouses but for three women in the group, the loved ones who died were their own children. Sylvia had recently lost her son, who had moved in with her and for whom she cared during his illness until his death. She was still in her grief when our interview took place, his death having occurred only months earlier. Muriel, too, had lost her son, though unexpectedly, in the September 11, 2001 attack on the Pentagon just six months prior to our interview. It was these deaths that signaled changes for both Sylvia and Muriel, both internally and externally. Sylvia spoke of using her grief to “revamp” herself, to look at how she had responded and reacted to life in the past and to make the decision to act differently in the future. I spoke to Muriel several months after the interview. She had moved to a new home, “a castle” as she described it, with funds she received from the government and from Red Cross after her son’s death. “It is my son’s legacy,” she told me.

Besides her son’s death, Sylvia survived the death of her husband about which she did not speak during the interview other than to say that he died in 1971 and that she still missed him very much. It was her mother’s death, however, that taught her about dealing with her own and other’s mortality with dignity.

I learned from the way in which she died with her strength and purpose. I remember covering her with a blanket and she looked up at me and I knew that I was the mother. I said, “This must be really hard for you for me to be the one who is putting you to bed.” And she

said yes. But she held my hand, and she said, "But I am glad you are here." So I learned from that and it helped me with other deaths or my own and coming to grips with my own mortality.

All of the women met the challenges and obstacles of life with determination, strength, courage, optimism and a view to the gifts or opportunities, not just the challenges they faced. Louise's philosophy reflected that of the rest of the women: "Challenges, problems, you meet one every day. You solve it or at least get started on it that day." Others might add: "And then you move on."

Theme 6. Opinions About Old Age

Thoughts about Retirement: All of the women in this study have definite negative opinions about the slowing down or inactivity associated in our society with old age or retirement. Quan Yin and Mary Elizabeth are the only two in the group who maintained paid positions at the time of our interviews. The rest, although admittedly retired from original careers or paying jobs, did not think of or refer to themselves as retired. Interestingly, they talked about their retirements from their careers and jobs, even discussing the planning stages, medical problems or other aspects typically associated with retirement in old age. But when asked specifically how they felt about retirement, they all answered as if talking about a phenomenon that did not apply to them, shunning retirement as an unconstructive, boring, depressing thing to be spurned. Their continued activity kept them busy, feeling productive and somehow separate from their perceptions of retirement as a time of inactivity and boredom.

To Mary Elizabeth, the word retirement signaled “waiting for death.” It was her desire to remain not just active but productive.

There’s too much to live for. Just because somebody gets older doesn’t mean they can’t love babies or do something somewhere. If I was told never to go to the orphanage or hospital again, I’d probably go to Tijuana and see what I could do there. There are orphanages there. There is always plenty to do. I just couldn’t sit around and grow old.

Anne shared this disdain for nonproductive retirement. She carefully planned her days and stated emphatically, “I think it’s very important to do that when you’re retired because hours go by and you can accomplish nothing.” In fact, she was quite judgmental about those who sit back and watch rather than getting actively involved in life.

The people I know are go-getters. They’re out and they are just constantly doing something. And when I look upon these people that don’t participate, I get discouraged. But I always come back to, wow, that was [always] the way they were. You can’t change them. They sit back. I call them the great evaluators.

Although realistic about some limitations of health, energy or resources in old age, the women in the study could not even imagine a life of inactive retirement. Felicia admitted, “Old age has its problems. [It] is not quite what they say it is. It’s supposed to be the time you really are able to sit back and let it flow. I can’t.”

As noted in her story, to Quan Yin, old age is “when you stop doing.” She confessed, “I don’t know that I ever will [retire]. I don’t know what would be fun about that.” Donna echoed Quan Yin’s assessment of the lack of interest in inactivity. She noted, “I would be bored out of my head. When I had cataract surgery last week, and, I was sort of grounded for a couple of days, it just about drove me nuts.” But she noted, “I can’t keep on forever. Somewhere out there among these young people there has got to be somebody who is going to carry the torch after I can’t anymore.” This is why she has taken up her cause to promote the educational program she has initiated at the center and why she pursues it so vigorously.

More than a desire to stay away from boredom, the call to activity is a call to purpose for most of the women in the study. As Ruby stated,

I have to keep doing something as long as I am here. I feel this way about it: if the Lord has something else for me to do He’ll leave me here to do it and if he doesn’t He’ll say, “You’re through.”

The women saw opportunities to be active in their communities abounding all around them. According to Quan Yin, “All you have to do is just turn on the television for 20 minutes and you can find a job. Not necessarily a paying job but something like writing e-mails to the Congress and the Senate and the legislators... You, know, get with life.”

Thoughts About Their Own Aging and Themselves in Old Age:

Descriptions of their own aging process or what old age meant to them personally were, for the most part, positive. As with the word “retirement,”

there was a sense of separation of themselves from the term “old age.”

Quan Yin said with disdain, “I just think [old age] is somebody’s label. It just doesn’t fit me.” Sylvia too said, “It’s hard for anybody, I think, to say, ‘I am old’ because of the whole societal view of old.” She continued,

In some other cultures, old is to be revered. Now I am not asking for adoration, for being revered. But just treat me as I am - a human being - just as I would treat any young person. ... There is a recognition when you’re older that it isn’t going to last forever and I figured, here I am 81.

Donna noted that she was actually much busier now in her old age than at previous times in her life and that she had the luxury of time to pick and choose and leave if an activity was not satisfactory. For Ann old age was an “un-event.” She said, “I don’t even *think* of how old I am unless somebody says, ‘How old are you anyway?’” While both Ann and Muriel referred to old age as “the peak of my life,” Muriel added even more enthusiastically, “I feel fulfilled, I feel nurtured, I feel supported, I feel lucky.” Quan Yin’s statement reflected the same feeling when she said, “I feel very blessed. I work with a purpose; have great people that I am working with. I have wonderful kids and grandkids. A lovely home in a gorgeous setting. Does it get better than this? I don’t think so.” It was Ruby, however, who was the most vocal about one of the benefits of old age. “I think it is great because you can do whatever you want to do and all you have to do is say, ‘I’m over 65; I can do whatever I want to do.’ Now I am over 80. I do what I want to do!”

There were some comments about old age that were not just bright, positive, and upbeat. Some spoke of the frustrations of being treated as less than capable. Felicia was the most vocal when she said, "People assume because I am older I have certain frailties. Yes, I have frailties; I am the first one to admit it. But this up here is still functioning very, very well. I resent it when [people] give me a signal that I am a dumb dodo." The admission of "frailties" or medical conditions or the need to slow down was not forthcoming for most of the women and even for those who admitted to being in less than perfect health or having less than perfect stamina countered any not-so-positive with another statement reflecting positive spirit, appreciation for the present and hope for the future. Donna spoke about being so intent on getting her project off the ground and running on its own so that she could take some more time to herself. "That's the goal, to make this sort of a self-sustaining place so I don't feel like I have to be here all the time. I don't have the stamina I used to have but I have luxury of time to do many of the things that I want to do." Muriel's descriptions of her feeling of old age followed her acknowledgment of her heart condition: "So why am I here? To act sort of like a role model and hopefully keep this heart ticking." Louise was asked what she thought of old age. "It shouldn't happen so soon," she replied with a laughing smile and eyes that looked downward as though remembering a different time, voice slightly softer and with a touch of sadness through the laugh, "I am physically challenged now because of the cancer. It actually does slow me down a little bit. Just a little." But she continued,

I wouldn't trade places with anybody in this whole world. I am perfectly content being who I am. ... Old age is more a state of mind sometimes than a physical limitation. I'm impatient to get on with the next thing.

Description of Self and How It Has Changed: Descriptions of themselves offered by the women were positive, reflective of their values, indicative of having found a place in life that felt comfortable to them. There was a resoluteness and contentment with their lot in life and with their experiences. Their descriptions revealed a sense of gratitude and acknowledgment of their contribution to the world, and yet a continued need to give and to be of service. There were women who know they can face life's adventures and were unafraid of what life held in store for them. Their self-descriptions follow.

Ann: I'm creative, thoughtful, loving, caring, intellectual, outgoing, friendly, willing to take risks, not afraid of the future.

Louise: I am a 75 year old great-grandmother who loves her family very dearly, her community almost as much. Very active, involved in people things, issues, who wants to leave the world a better place than she found it.

Felicia: I am a person who gets a lot of satisfaction out of contact with persons who are achieving.

Quan Yin: Smart, dedicated, persistent, pretty, talented. I have been a Don Quixote type.

Ruby: Dynamic, tremendously blessed. I have very good health at my age.

Donna: I always thought that one very descriptive phrase would be: I never leave a shopping cart in the middle of the parking lot. ... Semi-organized and methodical, persistent, stubborn, probably to a fault. True Gemini, jack-of-all-trades and master of none. ... I don't consider myself a high-energy person. I have a tendency to just keep going, sort of like a bulldog. When I get my teeth into something I want to get, I don't want to just quit in the middle of it.

Sylvia: In some ways, passionate. I have a fair amount of strength and enthusiasm for living and really a lot of love for both my family and for the things I consider worthwhile.

Muriel: I am bright, I am friendly, I have led an interesting life and so it reflects. I'm valuable. I was a good wife, but always an independent free spirit and never very, very serious at the role. I was always a progressive thinker and a liberal. ... I think some of my independence is hard fought and well-deserved and it's there to be shared and if I have to be a role model, I'll be a role model.

Each of the women was asked if her description of herself would have been different 20 or 40 years prior to our interviews, when they were not in old age. To a person, the women responded that their self-descriptions would have been less positive and their lives more limited when they were younger than in their old age, both in terms of their activities and choices, as well as their ability to express themselves and their confidence in themselves. Quan Yin noted that she was not as self-effacing at the time of the interview as she was when younger. "Twenty years ago, I probably wouldn't have owned being a leader as

comfortably as I can own it now.” Ruby noted that she thought “a lot” more of herself now than she had 40 years ago “because then I was kind of silly and I felt I needed things to be happy and now I know everything I need I have and everything else is just stuff I want and I don’t even want a lot things.” Donna noted that she actually had fewer medical problems now than 20 years ago so her life was much less limited. Sylvia, too, said that 20 or 40 years earlier she might have been more reluctant and less able to express her confidence.

Description of Self as Leader: Although they might not have consciously thought of themselves as leaders as they went about their daily lives and even in their endeavors that others would label leadership activities, when asked specifically and in the context of this study if they thought of themselves as leaders, the women were able to admit that they were. When asked why they would consider themselves leaders, their answers reflected a variety of definitions of leader and leadership. This is not surprising since there are scores of definitions of both in the literature on the subject. Both Sylvia and Ruby viewed themselves as leaders because of their ability to bring people together for a common purpose. As Sylvia noted, “I can convince people to work together. I like to work with other people and I like to get ideas, even if they don’t agree with mine and see if I can learn something from it and see if we can come somewhere where we can do something for action.” Ruby’s response also reflected a kind of servant leadership¹³ when she said she was a leader “because I follow orders.” She continued,

¹³ See Greenleaf (1977) and discussion in Chapter Six.

I find other people who are going to help you work to solve [a problem]. You can't do it by yourself. You look at things and say this needs to be done but what I need to do is get people together with like minds and then we'll get it done.

Louise believed that she was a leader "because if something needs to be done and nobody else volunteers to do it, I'll show them how." It is interesting that she did not say she would do *for* them but that she would empower others by teaching them how to do for themselves. Quan Yin said she felt she was a leader because of leadership positions she so often found herself being asked to take. She told me. "I always am [a leader]. It's just if I join a club, I end up being the president and usually for two to three years. I guess people feel that they can trust me."

Advice to Others: Some of the most telling comments about the women's feelings of old age and their power and position in it came in the form of advice to other women in old age. They were asked what they would tell other old women who were themselves told to retire, relax, slow down, etc. Their answers were adamant, emphatic, defiant and almost angry. They were also reflective of their own battles to counteract age stereotypes. Mary Elizabeth stated, "Oh, I don't pay any attention to people like that that say I should retire. There's too much to live for."

Ruby was a bit more demonstrative. She said she would tell women who wanted to be active to "keep doing it. Tell [those who say to slow down] to go to hell." Quan Yin said she "would tell them to get over it and

get on with something that makes them feel alive.” And Ann’s advice was similar but with an added comment about the importance of activity: “Get involved in organizations and stimulate that brain because if you don’t you’re going to lose it.” Like Ann, Felicia’s felt that, “Your growth is stunted if you don’t participate,” adding that other people’s advice slow down is “a trap” in that her mind would suffer if she did so.

Louise noted that she “would say listen to yourself and your own inclinations. If you really want to do something, figure out a way to begin. Because once you begin it will strengthen your determination to do it.” And Sylvia’s advice was to “Speak up, be strong.” Donna’s advice reflected both a philosophy and the reality for the women in the study when she said, “Hang in there dears. Sixty-five isn’t old anymore. It’s just a doorway into all kinds of opportunity.”

Summary

An analysis of narrative revealed several key concepts that ran through the data and emerged as themes common to the group. These themes were: 1) the importance of education and life-long learning, 2) a history of success and achievement that served as a template for leadership in old age, 3) the vital nature of a strong support system from which to draw emotional strength, 4) how the characteristic of giving support to others led to servant leadership in old age, 5) the ability to overcome obstacles through persistence, a positive attitude and a

willingness to risk, and 6) how the image of self and old age determined a commitment to remain vital and productive.

In Chapter Six, the themes will be expanded upon and further analyzed, and recommendations made that resulted from these analyses.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This narrative qualitative study was aimed at observing women leaders in old age. The purpose was to give voice to the expression and experiences of women over the age of 65 who were engaged in leadership activities that were new to them in their old age. The objectives of the study were: 1) to obtain life story narratives from each woman in an effort to document the experiences, decisions and insights that led to these endeavors at this stage in their lives; 2) to examine the themes that emerged from these life stories; and 3) to integrate the narratives and themes in a way that will further our understanding of the potential contributions of older women in our society.

Nine women, ranging in age from 68 to 83, were interviewed. In Chapter Four, each of the women was introduced in her own story, giving the reader a glimpse into the experiences that shaped her unique life and the lessons she brought with her from those experiences to her leadership in old age as evidenced by her views and philosophies on leadership and on old age itself. In Chapter Five, the themes that emerged as commonalities regardless of the life experiences of the individuals involved were elucidated. In this chapter, the findings are analyzed further to see what lessons we, as observers, can take from both the individual experiences and the themes common to the group.

Chapter Six, then, will look at what we can learn from the women in this study about becoming leaders in old age, about old age itself and about human development. There are also lessons to be learned from these women about overcoming obstacles and the impact of role models and social support systems. These, too, will be discussed. Finally, there are recommendations that can be gleaned from these lessons that may benefit old women as well as our society in general.

Reflections on the Process of Feminist Research

The original intent of this research was to study women leaders in old age using both narrative analysis and analysis of narrative approaches. The methodology called for an in-depth investigation of the women's life stories and the examination of the data provided by individual interviews. During the development of the narratives utilizing this data, it became apparent that, although it was not my original intention to do so, this study fell within the confines of what is considered to be feminist research. As such, it carries with it the strengths and limitations common to critiques of all types of feminist research.

The method of inquiry utilized in this study incorporated conversational interviews. The method of analysis involved both narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. The methodology utilizing both narrative ethnography and reflexive ethnography emerged from feminist epistemologies. Although a review of feminist theories of knowledge is outside the scope of this study, it is important to

note some of the basic tenets that cut across the various frameworks and methodologies used in feminist research that were employed herein.

Akman et al. (2001), after reviewing feminist theories and methodologies in social science literature, found four core principles that cut across theoretical orientations:

- (1) the recognition of the validity and importance of women's experiences;
- (2) the challenge to traditional scientific inquiry; (3) the concern about power imbalances between the researchers and the research participants;
- and, (4) the insistence on the political nature of research. (p. 213)

These principles, while found in other types of inquiry as well, are vital elements and central to feminist research in general and to this study in particular. They form a foundation for the processes of data gathering and data presentation that are at once the strengths and the limitations of this study.

First, it is a basic principle and assumption of feminist research that women's experiences are not only valid but important sources of knowledge (e.g., Akman, 2001; Harding, 1987; Oleson, 2000). In fact, as noted by Joyappa & Self (1996),

A hallmark of feminist research methodologies is insistence that all human experience is worthy of being acknowledged, documented and analyzed. Women's experience is given weight in the process of social criticism and change. For example, personal narratives and oral histories are seen as valuable primary sources rather than as subjectively flawed information. Data from everyday lived experience is collected and critically examined

from varied perspectives in order to better understand and improve that experience (p. 17).

This assumption has implications for the choice of methodology, the choice of participants, and the recognition of the researcher's own experience on the shaping of the knowledge produced. In this case, the very nature of the research, i.e. the study of a marginalized group (women leaders in old age) was based on the assumption that their voices needed to be heard and had something of importance to tell us. In addition, the voice of the researcher was included to acknowledge not only my presence in the interactions with the women but also as a further acknowledgement and validation of the experiences of insidious biases that are present in the lives of the participants even by those who consciously attempt to deny or remove those biases. Reflexive narrative was a part of this study because, as noted by Akman et al. (2001), the "commitment to validating women's experiences extend[s] to our own [i.e. the researchers'] experience as well" (p. 216). Crawford and Kimmel (1999) noted further that

Innovative feminist research methods are characterized by an awareness of the personhood and involvement of the researcher (Reinharz, 1992)- what Sue Wilkinson (1988) has called personal reflexivity. It is a kind of "disciplined self-reflection" on who we are, how our identities ... influence our work and, in turn, how our work influences these aspects of self. (p. 3)

The second principle, which challenges traditional scientific inquiry, embodies the idea that scientific inquiry is never value-free. The research

process must therefore be contextualized and, again, the researcher's perspectives and biases self-consciously reflected upon and acknowledged. Feminist research questions the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity (Campbell & Schram, 1995), and acknowledges the "false idealization of objectivity" (p. 88) that Lerum (2001) called the wearing of "academic armor" in attempts to claim objectivity in the face of scientific inquiry. Choices of what to study, who will participate, what behaviors, words or actions will be noted and which will be ignored all play into and emerge from the experience and history of the researcher.

The distinction between objectivity and subjectivity leads to yet another concern that underpins feminist research about power imbalances and status differences. Even with attempts to deconstruct hierarchies within the researcher-researched relationship, they nonetheless always exist. While exploitive practices are shunned and consideration is given to the participants with respect to the nature of the consent process, the interview process and the presentation of data, nonetheless there is still a power differential between researcher and those researched. It is, when all is said and done, the researcher's words that explain and discuss the findings. To attend to this power discrepancy while still noting its existence, participants in this study were given the opportunity to add, delete, or amend the interview data and attempts were made to include the voices of the participants through extensive quotes. In addition, acknowledgement of existence of this differential of power within the context of the research is yet another reason why my own comments, feelings and biases were included in the

presentation of data and discussion of findings. In a further attempt to add age and gender perspective to my interpretations of the data, peer review included two 30 year-old women, a woman aged 60, and a man of my age (50) who were asked to read both the interviews and my analysis of those interviews and offer their insights into my interpretations. However, further research is warranted by men and by other women, both older and younger, all of whom who would bring their own varying perspectives to the work.

Finally, feminist research is distinctive in its desire and potential to bring about change. Raghuram et al. (1998) explained that "Feminist research aims not only to record or interpret external realities but also explicitly aims to promote social transformations" (p. 37). While it is my hope that a study of this nature will allow us to see another perspective of aging, and particularly that women can be, and in fact are, leaders in old age, it must be acknowledged that this study rests upon a small group of women identified as outliers with respect to our societal stereotypes of aging, of women and of leaders. Further research is called for with larger numbers of women, as well as more diverse populations of women at least in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, geographic diversity, and educational levels.

With the above principles in mind of feminist research in mind, I must now reflect back on both the process and content of this work and address some revelations of my own biases. I approached this study with the assumption that my beliefs about old age were positive and, as stated in Chapter One, "that women leaders in old age would have something of value to tell us, something

from which we could learn and draw conclusions about women, old age, leaders, and ourselves with respect to each of those categories.” In hindsight, I am able to see that, at least on some level, I had bought into the stereotypes of old age as a time of nonproductivity, decline and deterioration. This is not to say I embraced the truth of the stereotypes themselves for I am certain that on a conscious level I did not. (Quite the opposite, I sought to dispel the stereotypes beginning with this very work.) Rather, I mean that I took them at face value as all-encompassing values that pervade our society and that needed to be changed. But how arrogant, and at once naïve, to believe that my views of the stereotypes around me have produced only what I see. But I suspect arrogant and naïve are adjectives that describe us when stereotypes pervade our thinking. And how even more insidious are these stereotypes that we cannot see them until we have stepped on them and been tripped up by them. In this case, the tripping came with reflection and writing about experiences that occurred during the interview phase of this work.

I found an evolution of consciousness about my views of aging through the two-year process of the writing of this work. The first conscious awareness of my own anti-age bias occurred when I met Felicia. As I mentioned in her story, I had not known until I arrived at her home that she lived in an assisted care facility. My negative reaction, a feeling that she would be too “old” (translate “not fully capable”) struck my awareness like a slap in the face. I was embarrassed to have embodied the very stereotype I had set out to dispel.

At the other end of the spectrum, but essentially equivalent in scope, was my reaction to Quan Yin that she looked to “young” (translate “too good”) to be a participant. Again, my reactions to these two women were just that – instantaneous, unplanned, unconscious responses. Once made conscious through the process of researching and writing and reflecting, these responses were at once a source of embarrassment and of validation of the nature of the stereotyping of aging that is so prevalent in our society, through the filters of which I too approached old age and from which my reactions followed.

Continued reflections and discussions made me think of the ways in which my biases might have invaded the work in others ways. Indeed, I found that, in addition to the impact of the stereotypes on my personal life, my assumptions about aging, filtered through the personal and societal filters and lenses, such as my age, culture and previous experiences, impacted the research itself. As much as my background was positive in that it was a catalyst for action, it was also negative in that it colored the lenses through which I viewed the work itself, specifically in the review of the literature. If I am honest, I must admit that my perceptions of what was in the literature had to have been influenced by these filters and lenses. Although I did allude to the fact that there were a few positive examples and stories of vital, active and productive men and women in old age, I did not focus on them or highlight any examples. A significantly deeper look into those positive stories of aging could well have provided fodder for enriched discussion of how the stories themselves are portrayed, as well as differences and similarities between them and the stories of the women in this study.

Perhaps a different set of filters and lenses would have yielded even more positive examples of aging, as a foundation for this work and a basis on which to build an even broader or swifter culture change so that our social constructs of old age and aging can themselves become more positive.

Becoming Leaders

Four of the five research questions addressed by the study related specifically to how the women came to be leaders in their old age. They were: 1) How have women begun their involvement in new leadership endeavors in their old age? 2) What life experiences prepared them to take up these pursuits? 3) What are the similarities among the women in both motivating factors and the means by which they carried out their choices? 4) What obstacles did they face and what assistance did they receive in pursuing these choices?

The term “postmenopausal zest”, the origination of which is commonly attributed to Margaret Mead, is used to denote the surge in energy many women feel following menopause. There have been hormonal explanations (see Sheehy, 1995) and social explanations for this time in a woman’s life, after the completion of obligations to her family, when spouses retire and children have left the home. This surge in energy has been cited as a reason for attempts by middle aged or old aged women to delve into new endeavors. It is believed that a woman’s suppressed desires for personal achievement no longer need take a backseat to societal expectations for her time and attention to family and that postmenopause becomes a time when she can do for herself and find a sense of achievement outside of family.

This may be the case but it appears that, for some of the women in this study, personal achievement, even outside the family, was a lifelong journey founded on behaviors, characteristics and traits established early in their lives. They carried with them into their old age their enthusiasm, their creativity, their positive “I can do it” spirit that had been nurtured in many cases through a series of experiences, some as early as childhood or young adulthood.

While most of the women in the study were involved in pursuits that differed somewhat from earlier stages in their lives, they brought skills and confidence based on previous experiences in life to their activities in old age in an effort to continue to make a difference in the lives of others.

They did not “buy into” the stereotype of old age as a time of decline or deterioration or even of slowing down much. Age presented challenges to them but they met those challenges with energy and grace and without desire to relax their pace or stop being active. In fact, they had a strong sense of commitment to living a full and engaged life all through their old age.

The time when our society deems one “old” was not seen by these women as either a marker or a barrier. They continued as they did prior to reaching their ages at the time of our interviews, with verve and enthusiasm for life, making plans and accomplishing objectives. While some in our society would say that old age is a time to pursue endeavors that bring personal pleasure and that one has not been able to pursue when other material and worldly demands require their time and attention, these women would have likely countered that they *are*

enjoying their lives and that they *are* pursuing that which brings them fulfillment and joy.

The women in the study fell outside of the stereotypes perpetuated in our society that portray old age as a time of inner contemplation nearly void of public service or public accomplishment. Rather than falling prey to societal ideas of old age as a time of deterioration, they continued in their patterns of enjoying life, continuing to serve, and not being afraid to be leaders and innovators who use their experience and wisdom to create better lives for their community and their world. In fact, they not only continued those patterns but have expanded them by reaching across new boundaries of achievement.

However, most of the women in the study did not actively seek to become leaders. Their new leadership endeavors in old age were a direct result of being invited, urged, or pushed into helping someone else. This is not necessarily uncommon and, as previously mentioned, opportunity and serendipity can play a large role in the rise of some women to positions of leadership (Muskopf, 1998; Roubanis, 2000). While some books and articles in the popular press (e.g., Gallagher & Golant, 2000; Helgesen, 1995; Morrison, White and Van Velsor, 1987; Wellington, 1998) tell women how to go about actively pursuing positions of leadership, the women in this study came to leadership, not seeking it, but answering a call to service.

But what was there about these women that would bring them to answer the call? One might say that they were a product of their time. They had lived through the Depression and witnessed “the diminishment of men and women”

(as Ruby described it) as they lost their homes, jobs, and self-respect. This may have set up a determination, as it did with Ruby, to not allow that to happen to them and may have also instilled a desire to help others. In addition, all of the women were in adolescence or young adulthood at the time of World War II. American culture at that time told everyone to pitch in and do one's part, answering the call of country. The women in this study experienced and answered this call to aid throughout the war years.

And, finally, women in their age cohort, being limited in the occupations and opportunities afforded to them, were generally relegated to service-type work. When the only work they could do outside the home involved some kind of service to others (e.g. nursing, teaching, secretarial work), and the work they did within their families involved service work to husband and children, the mind-set of service was life-long and encompassing. In addition, some of the women in the study were brought up in situations in which they learned and/or were specifically taught to stand up for others. A lifetime of doing for others in one way or another may have made their answering a call for help from another a natural response.

A small case in point that illustrates their willingness to serve is the fact that all of these women agreed to be in this study. They did not know me. In many cases, they did not know they had even been referred for the study. So, my calls to them were cold calls and I was a stranger asking them to let me into their private lives to hear about details from their life stories. I wondered about their willingness to speak thus to a stranger. A couple of the women spoke of it in the course of their interviews. Muriel talked of being a role model for others. Louise

spoke of her gratitude for the opportunity to share. And, I believe they all wished for a platform from which to share their feelings about what they were doing and what they believed in. Why this venue? Opportunity perhaps, but certainly willingness to help another. I asked for help in my research and explained that it was my hope that the study would help women in old age. They answered the call.

In the 1970's, Greenleaf (1977) coined the term "servant leadership", based on Leo, a character from Hermann Hesse's novel, *Journey to the East*. Leo was a servant who accompanied a group of men on their journey, attending to them with song, doing their menial chores. When Leo disappeared, the group eventually disbanded in disarray. Leo was later found and discovered to be a great and noble leader of an order, a position he held, albeit unknown to the group, even at the time of his service to them. Greenleaf then described the modern servant leader as one who is first servant to the organization and then, through choice, comes to lead. This concept has experienced a resurgence of attention in the last few years as well-known business writers (e.g., Bennis & Thomas, 2002; Spears & DePree, 1995; Spears, Lawrence & Blanchard, 2001) have reiterated and expounded on Greenleaf's ideas as they pertain to today's society.

A look at the stories of the women in this study leads one to conclude that these women were, indeed, servant leaders. They did not choose to be leaders first, motivated by desire for power, money, or other reward. Rather, they chose first to be of service and then became leaders for the causes in which they

served. Their belief in their ability to accomplish what they set out to do for others appeared to be based more on humility and the desire to follow through with commitments to others than on ego-centered desire. For example, Anne's coming term as president in yet another organization was with a group whose sole purpose was to help others in their community. As president of that group, Anne again found herself "leader of leaders."

All well and good. We can describe the women in the study as servant leaders. But, perhaps they stand as models for women leaders in a larger sense. Perhaps this is the leadership that women have always modeled. Researchers of women's adult development (e.g., Belenky., Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986) tell us that women's personality development is organized around the concepts of responsibility and care and connections to others. These notions certainly tie in to Greenleaf's model of servant leader and beg us to ask whether this is precisely what women bring to the picture as leaders, both in the past and today. Helgesen (1995) wrote of women leading through a "web" in which women were at the center of a model of communication and inclusion, replacing earlier organizational models based on hierarchy and rank. The web itself represents responsibility, care, and connection.

Greenleaf asked several questions to distinguish the servant leader from those who were not. Among them was "the effect on the least privileged in society: will they benefit, or at least, not be further deprived?" (quoted in Spears, Lawrence & Blanchard, 2001, p. 24). The women in the study were servant leaders whose aim was to have a positive effect on the lives of others. Ruby took

action because she wanted to “accomplish something... [to] think that things are a little bit better because you did something.” As noted, the initial ventures in which they became leaders in old age occurred as a result of their willingness to step forward to answer a call for help and to make a difference in their world.

The women worked in organizations, or groups that they themselves initiated, through creative means and by including others and creating their own webs of communication through which to achieve their visions. Both the structures with which the women viewed leadership and their values with respect to inclusion, service and making the world better for those who are led are not new to today's women nor are they specific to the women in this study, if we are to believe the authors cited above.¹⁴

With the resurgence of the notion of servant leadership and its rise to popularity in the popular press, women who have been relegated to be servers, in service, and servants at the behest of a culture that demeans service through low pay, and often little respect, now find that this culture praises service when applied to men who lead. We might conclude that the world is becoming more egalitarian or that men have discovered what women have known and been practicing for a very long time. The question becomes: if practiced by typically

¹⁴The literature on gender differences in leadership is controversial, however (Powell, 1993). Researchers at the Center for Creative Leadership, for example, claim that “the basis for claiming differences between executive women and executive men ... is suspicious at best” (Morrison, A.M., White, A.P, Van Velsor, E., 1992, p. 49). In contrast to these authors and the authors who believe that there are stereotypical gender differences between men and women leaders, still another conclusion found in the literature is that gender differences in leaders are, in fact, opposite to what one would expect according to gender stereotypes. Those who support this point of view purport that, at least in the areas of business and management, in order to reach leadership positions women “have had to be exceptional to overcompensate for early socialization experiences that are different from those of men” (Powell, 1993, p. 160). Within the

subordinate groups, such as women and the aged, can such leadership be respected and lauded by those who have been in traditionally dominant groups, so that we as a society can take advantage of it's benefits and experience growth as a caring culture?

Rather than believing that the women in this study were merely following societal expectations to be of service, we must note that they defied such expectations in many ways by the very fact that they became not only involved but also leaders in their old age. In addition, the women in the study consciously rejected societal expectations throughout their lives, at least on some level. Quan Yin spoke of reading the books that had been banned by her church. Ruby spoke of being the first African American woman to work where she did. Felicia fought expectations to serve as the first African American in the State Senior Legislature. Louise learned how to do electrical and other home repairs at a time that such work was so rare for women that she had to prove to building inspectors that it was actually her own work. Now, in their old age, they rejected the labels and beliefs of old age that pervade our culture and with which they were bombarded daily.

Once involved in the activity to which they were invited, however, what made them stay and what made them become the leaders they became? Sheehy (1995) in describing findings from a conference on "The New Older Women" held at Esalen Institute, noted that the women in their sixties and older found "a new vitality and exhilaration." She explained, "The source of continuing

context of this study, the small sample size does not allow for verification or contradiction of theory in this area.

aliveness was to find your passion and pursue it, with whole heart and single mind” and that this new source would “make the years ahead even more precious than the past” (p. 197).

In a study of vital and active men and women in very old age, Perron (1990) noted that all of the participants in her study held strong convictions and a strong sense of purpose. (In addition, the participants in her study maintained strong social ties, a finding that will be referred to later in this chapter.) Roubanis’ (2000), research on presidents of institutes of higher learning identified as the themes for their rise to presidency: education, the opportunity to lead and the motivation to give voice to under-represented groups. When we look at the stories of the women in this study, we see the belief in their work and in their cause; that is, we see the pursuit of their passion. In fact, Sylvia used the term “passionate” to describe herself. She was speaking of her “strength and enthusiasm for living” but one can see the passion in her pursuit of activities that helped her help women, especially old women. Her work with the State Senior Legislature, her three terms as president of the Older Women’s League, her ongoing adult education classes teaching old women how to advocate, all point to her passion for issues involving old women. Donna’s lifelong passion for nature and the environment were evident not only in her work but also in her avocations as well. Felicia and Ruby’s tireless work on behalf of African Americans revealed their passion for what they did and the belief in their causes. Without the strength of belief in what they were doing, it is doubtful that the women in the study could have maintained their energy and enthusiasm for the

length of time at which they worked. With deep belief in what they were doing, however, they were able to bring enthusiasm, energy, persistence, willingness to take risks, and ability to overcome obstacles, all of which were necessary to accomplish what they did.

Motivation and conviction of purpose are mirrored by the motivation and strength of conviction demonstrated by the women in the study. Their motivation came from being of service, rather than the idea of personal gain. None of the women in the study were leaders in paid careers. Indeed, all of the women served as leaders in a voluntary capacity. Although all worked outside the home prior to old age, and many achieved a high degree of success in those chosen fields, the activities in which they were leaders in old age were voluntary positions involving issues and activities they found worthy of their time, attention and energy. In a sense, the fact that these women put so much of themselves into work for which they were not paid is an extension of the service mindset referred to previously.

Overcoming Obstacles

The women in the study were fighters. They had histories of standing up not only for others but also for themselves. They faced prejudices throughout their lives because of their gender. Some faced other “isms” as well, such as racism, and anti-Semitism. In old age, another ism was added to the obstacles against which they fought: ageism. Perhaps a lifetime of having to overcome these isms was a preparation or training ground for meeting the obstacles of old age.

They were not afraid of risk and confrontation. When faced with men in her organization who resisted her creative ideas of her and those of the other women with whom she collaborated, Ann strategized and stood up to them. During the interview, as she told me of her plans, she referred to the men who had tried to stand in the way of what she believed in. With a smile, she said, "Oh, they're going to have trouble with us!" Quan Yin expressed the same sort of fortitude and determination when speaking of the politicians whom she felt made policies that hurt women. She did not shrink from the fight for her beliefs in what was right. She stated,

I am so angry about it... I would just like to diddle back. Just to make them so uncomfortable. Just have e-mails and letters and phone calls and marches and whatever so these politicians start shaking and saying, "Well, maybe we'll take care of women right here."

The women faced their challenges and obstacles with creativity. Ann and her group of collaborators decided to approach their state-wide problem by building strength at a local level and then taking on the state hierarchy with masses of numbers. Mary Elizabeth, in looking for a location for the orphanage and hospital she helped to found, reconstructed an old hotel that now houses the facilities she needed. Their adaptability to circumstances may have been a result of learning to adapt to the changes and discontinuity facing women throughout their lives in changes of family life, job and career starts and stops, and the changes that accompany losses of loved ones. If so, this adaptability served

them well in their old age. Freidan (1993) noted that “women experiencing more change and discontinuity were more vital later in life” (p. 143).

Their adaptability, fighting spirit, and creativity helped them rise above circumstances. Many researchers tell us that old age can be a productive time as long as health is maintained. But the women in the present study were all productive in spite of sometimes severe and ongoing, even life-threatening, health challenges. Ruby had, in fact, retired from her job for medical health reasons. Quan Yin was a cancer survivor and lived, even at the time of the interview, with constant pain from a medical condition. Felicia had suffered a head injury from a car accident. Louise suffered from recurrent cancer and a heart condition. Muriel, too, had a heart condition that limited her physical activities. Donna suffered from cataracts and lupus, among other medical challenges. Despite these conditions, certainly all significant health obstacles, all of the women were still active, productive leaders in old age.

This fact leads to at least two questions: Why did they choose to overcome the obstacles and continue or begin to be leaders? And what made them able to do so? The answer to the why question has been alluded to already. These women were given an opportunity to be part of a bigger picture, to go outside themselves to make changes they believed in. The desire to take up that opportunity was ongoing and never stopping. Within days of returning home from her fourth heart catheterization, Louise called me to add to the information from her interview. She did so because she wanted to tell other women that she did not begin her university education until age 42. Her desire to

make this information known was not to make herself look better but to help give hope to other women.

The question of what gave these women the inner strength to overcome their obstacles is an interesting one. There is a body of literature on transformation that tells us that traumatic events, such as diagnosis of cancer or loss of a loved one, change us in fundamental ways, make us more brave, more outspoken, more willing to risk, or changed in other dramatic ways (e.g., Bridges, 1980; Veltrop, 1999). It is felt that the transformative event itself causes the change. Perhaps. The idea of transformation gives us hope. But perhaps these women show us by the fact that they have they have survived trauma after trauma that such events may be mere proving grounds for lessons learned through less traumatic episodes. A lifetime of adapting to changing circumstances, to the starts and stops a woman in our society is likely to experience, to living with the isms of our American culture steeled these women, taught them the necessary skills for resilience that they would need for later challenges. Perhaps this is why these women aged as they did, and were able to maintain productivity in spite of obstacles that might stop many of us. This, too, is inspiring. Perhaps it is not necessary to have a transforming event to find the inner courage to age well, to continue to be of service in creative ways and to make a difference in the lives of others. Perhaps resilience can be bought at the hands of a multitude of little changes and events rather than the trial by fire afforded by one huge trauma. According to their stories, these women did not change as a result of specific events, incidents or occurrences. They evolved

over a lifetime and found themselves in old age the women of strength, honor and courage we found them.

Generativity¹⁵

Erikson, Erickson and Kivnick (1986), after interviewing 29 octogenarians, the parents of children who had participated in a 50-year long historical life story research project, found that "relationships with children and grandchildren form the major domain into which the elders in our study find themselves bringing into balance lifelong feelings of generativity and stagnation" (p. 95). Although all but one of the women in the study had children and many had great-grandchildren and some had great-great-grandchildren, their generativity appeared to be expressed, not in terms of their progeny (although this may have not been mentioned because of the different focus of the interviews), but instead in terms of the legacies they left or would leave in the organizations and for the causes in which they believed and felt strongly, and for those who came after them who would be helped by their works. As such, they considered themselves role models for others and felt a sense of obligation to "give back" by caring for others and by showing what was possible in old age. Sylvia's motivation for her participation in the Senior Olympics was to show others that "you can be any age and you can try it." Muriel, Anne, Sylvia, and Ruby all taught classes of some kind for students in old age. Louise's call to me after she read the transcript of her interview was to show others the

¹⁵ Concern for guiding the next generation. According to Eriksonian theory, the seventh conflict of personality development, which occurs at middle age, is one of generativity vs. stagnation. The extension of this work in the 1986 study proposed grand-generativity in old age.

possibility of beginning school in middle age. All of these were further examples of generativity, beyond the activities in which they were leaders for purposes of the study.

Feelings About Old Age

At least two positive lessons about old age can be taken from the stories of the women in this study. First, for the women in the study, old age continued to be a time of looking to the future at the same time that it was a time of looking backward over their past. The future did not cease to be. In fact, the future was a large factor in each of their lives and a source for their enthusiasm. And second, old age was a time of increased choices. While health concerns may have been a challenge, a life of adaptability and flexibility helped prepare them to meet the challenge with the same qualities. Despite these so-called obstacles, however, all of the women expressed a feeling that they had more choices about what to do or not do than at any other time in their lives.

There is, however, at least one major negative lesson about how we treat those in old age that can be gleaned from the stories in this study. The first is that ageism is so ingrained in our society that it exists not only in those who are young but also by virtue of the prejudices of those who are themselves in old age. There is a paradox in old age for these women. While they rejected the label "old", they took pride in the fact that they were an age considered to be old but were not themselves old in the way that society defined it. Many of them spoke of their age with pride but none of them identified with being "old". This paradox leads to a rejection of part of self, partly brought on by the double jeopardy of

sexism and ageism. Woolf (2002) pointed out that negative stereotypes of old women as ineffective, passive and dependent are an extension of sexist views of all women as having these characteristics. Even our so-called compliments to older women such as those in the study that they are somehow different than others means that we bought into the stereotypes. And, in order to accept the compliments, the women must reject a part of themselves by admitting their own rejection of older women.

How can one who is herself old have positive feelings about her own life and yet express strong negative feelings about others, even of the same age or younger, whom she considers "old"? This is partly a result of the development of self-identity that allows us to separate self and body, thus allowing one to see one's essential or core self as enduringly constant regardless of outer physical changes (Clarke, 2001). The women in the study were not in denial about their age, were aware of having to slow down a bit but thought of old age and slowing down in general and for others in specific as totally negative. Some had medical problems that required them to curtail a previous level of activity but still thought of "old" as something other than themselves.

Hurd (1995) pointed out that "rejection of the label 'old' is not a new idea" and that the ability to be active was the fine line by which the subjects of her study drew the distinction between themselves as "not old" and distanced themselves from those they considered "old." For the women in this study, that line was drawn slightly differently. Activity itself was not the marker. Indeed, activity for the sake of activity was looked down upon. Quan Yin spoke with

derision as she described her view of retirement filled with shallow activity: "How much shopping would I really want to do? I like having lunch with my girlfriends but I wouldn't want that to be my day and the only thing I did in a week."

Instead, the marker for these women was productivity and involvement in issues they felt were of importance. Even when physically limited, they measured worth and satisfaction through involvement and achievement. Felicia noted,

I am no longer physically able to participate in some things. ...I am sometimes asked to give my opinions, to give my critique of certain programs. I get a certain satisfaction from that. I am not as active as I once was but I still think I have contributed, if I'm given the information and the opportunity to analyze.

Our American stereotypes of aging can be harmful in other ways as well. There appears to be a form of self-fulfilling prophecy with respect to these stereotypes. Some aspects of our culture are so ingrained we do not even recognize them in ourselves; we buy into them and perpetuate them (Palmore, 1999; Levin & Levin, 1980). For example, if one accepts inactivity as the norm for old age and allows oneself to be less active or not active at all, the lack of activity itself leads to deterioration of muscle tone and energy, resulting in even less activity and more deterioration. If one accepts stereotypes of decreased sexual functioning, one might participate in less sexual activity, thus perpetuating the stereotype. The acceptance of these stereotypes can have disastrous results, including the failure to seek proper medical and mental health treatment in the belief that illnesses are simply a part of normal aging.

On the other extreme, however, is the assault on one's health and self-esteem when one tries to deny age. Attempts to reject one's age through various forms of cosmetic surgery, for example, can have far-reaching health ramifications. But beyond that, and both less obvious and more insidious, is the denial of self that results from the denial of age.

Passing – except as a consciously political tactic for carefully limited purposes – is one of the most serious threats to selfhood. ... Our true identity, never acted out, can lose its substance, its meaning, even for ourselves. Denial to the outside world and relief at its success ... blurs into denial of self. (MacDonald & Rich, 1991, p. 55)

Gloria Steinem, on turning 50, was told that she did not look her age. Her response is said to have been, "This is what 50 looks like." The women in the present study can serve as models for other women of "what old age looks like." I had a great aunt who, at the age of 98 and living in a resident care facility, refused visitors because she did not want anyone to see her looking old. We would shake our heads and laugh in derision. "She is 98!" we would say, "How else would she expect to look?" But that is not what she meant. She had fallen victim to the social stereotype of age and, when her health began to fail, did not want others to see her looking sickly, weak or helpless. So she used her last bit of energy and her life-long sense of independence to exert control over what she felt she could. If she had lost control over the aging of her own body, she would control who would see it. But it cost her and those who loved her the benefit of

one another's company. I looked down on her in my own judgmental fashion and thought, "Oh, isn't that cute." Well, no it isn't.

Even more recently, as I began this study, I found myself falling prey to the same stereotypes and images of aging. Albeit in different manifestations, it is still the same judgment of aging as solely negative. For example, at about the same time I began this project, it occurred to me to grow my hair long to be later donated to charity. As the dissertation project lingered on, my hair continued to grow and when it got fairly far past my shoulders, I began to have strong thoughts of cutting it. Not because I deemed the charity no longer worthy, but because I looked in the mirror and saw the wrinkles on my face and felt "old" and thought that I must look like a foolish old woman trying to look young.

The more I read for this study, however, (and especially feminist literature on the subject), and the more I spoke to and about the women in this study, the more I had to reflect on my own biases. I had had a sense of false pride in looking young without ever using any of the anti-aging products or surgeries that so bombard us by the media and that so many scoff at in public but secretly use or wish we could take advantage of in private. Wishing to look young and wishing to "act young" were my own prejudices about which I had been unaware. In addition, I had been unaware that I also harbored prejudices that said that if a woman were active and vital in old age she was somehow better than those who were not, somehow more deserving of being a role model and an inspiration.

But what I have found instead is that the women in this study are not inspirational because of their activities. They are not role models because they

are leaders or are in positions of leadership and /or authority in old age. These women are not “cute.” They are not helpless. They are not fragile. They are great and wonderful teachers who opened their hearts and shared their life stories to show us that there are options we can follow and that stereotypes are just that. They teach us that we can make our old age what we want it to be. They teach us that there will be obstacles and limitations and that we may need to be creative in our expression of service and leadership but that we can make it nonetheless. As Mary Elizabeth said, “I personally don’t think there is any true joy in life unless you’re serving others. That, to me, is true fulfillment of life. So that’s about it.”

These women were not bold and brash. They were, for the most part, quiet leaders who worked to improve their homes, communities, and world as leaders with gentleness based on inner strength. Camus wrote, “Great ideas, it has been said, come into the world as gently as doves. Perhaps, then, if we listen attentively, we shall hear, amid the uproar of empires and nations, a faint flutter of wings, the gentle stirring of life and hope” (quoted in Spears, Lawrence & Blanchard, 2001, p.23).

Continued Use of the Term “Old Age”

The women in this study were so averse to the term “old,” they separated themselves from the term itself. As has been noted, this separation has been documented in other studies of women in old age (e.g. Hurd, 1995). In addition, a large number of Baby Boomers (including myself) find themselves peeking into the doorway of old age right now. We inch forward, unwilling to take on the

negative connotations of the label we helped, through our technology, media, and indifference, to create. As stated in the well-known quote by a character in the comic strip Pogo (created by Walt Kelly), "We have met the enemy and it is us." If "old age" has such negative connotations and associations that those in it and those approaching it wish to separate themselves from the very word, perhaps we should consider alternatives.

As noted in Chapter One, the term "old age" is used in gerontological research literature to refer to those over age 65. However, as also pointed out, we live in an age of increasing longevity. When age 45 was the life expectancy at the time of Shakespeare, one could have been considered old at the age of 40 or even 35. But with life expectancies now close to age 80, and with centenarians a fast growing demographic, perhaps it is time to raise the bar of what we consider "old." Perhaps we should change the category of "old age" to age 75 or 80 or even older. Perhaps this label should be flexible and ever-changing to reflect the changing demographics of our society. As life expectancy changes, the boundaries of the term shift upward. On the other hand, changing the age at which we refer to someone as old does nothing to change our view of the term itself. It merely postpones the inevitable. This begs us to consider the worthiness of the continued use of the term itself.

We might consider the elimination of the term "old age," replacing it with a value-neutral term or one that has positive associations. But, certainly attempts have been made to find such labels. Terms like "senior citizen" used in advertisements to attract business (e.g. senior citizen discounts) unfortunately

take on the same negative associations as “old age” since everyone knows the terms are synonymous.

Furthermore, it is not just the terms “old” or “old age” that seem to cause aversion. For the women in this study, “retirement” aroused similar feelings of disdain. As noted by Nelesen (2003), “Right now may be the right time to retire the word ‘retirement.’” Nelesen quotes the *American Heritage Dictionary* definition of the term as “to go away; depart, as for rest, seclusion or shelter... to fall back, retreat” asks, “Can our society really afford for so many bright, accomplished individuals to retreat?” (*San Diego Union Tribune*, January 25, 2003, p.E7).

So, if we retire terms like old, old age, retirement, senior citizen without changing the underlying cultural association, we do little more than create a never-ending name change. As each new term is brought into use, regardless of the intentions, it becomes guilty by association and eventually bears the burden of the same stereotypes of the term it replaced.

What may be called for instead is to change the way the terms are used and received. What comes to mind then, is a culture shift to a perspective that views old age and the term itself as a positive. After all, in some societies age is revered. This shift could be approached from two perspectives, the first being a shift in attitude regarding the words themselves and the second being a shift in our attitude regarding the time of life they are used to describe and delineate.

A shift in the use of a descriptive term could come from either inside or outside the community to which it is applied. The question then becomes how to

achieve this change and whose responsibility and right it is to do so. Some words that are clearly pejorative or worse, when used, overused or used with pride by the very people to whom they are applied, become, if not positive, at least a bit less damaging through a desensitization process by those whom the term hurts. But in this case, perhaps only those who are in the community itself have the right to use the term. An example is the use of the term "queer" within the gay community. Used by outsiders against gays, the term was considered derogatory at best. However, once taken up by the gay community itself and applied to its own by its own with a sense of pride at the label and at being in a position of being an insider enough to use the term with pride, the label "queer" has lost a lot of its impact as a negative term. Perhaps it is the place of those already in old age who can teach us how to alter the term to a positive by embracing the label, bearing it proudly, demanding to be seen and heard and having their impact felt. Certainly groups such as the American Association of Retired People and the Older Women's League are attempting to do just that. And as more Baby Boomers enter the age categories represented by these organizations, perhaps their impact will be even greater. Unfortunately for women, however, there will need to be as much a culture shift toward a more positive perspective of women as for old age for, as had been discussed, there are large differences in our society in the amount of respect and dignity afforded old men as opposed to old women as well as the amount of vigor, sexuality and intelligence attributed to them.

But there is a difficulty in drawing comparisons between the term “queer” in the gay community and the term “old age” for those over 65. The gay community is, in a sense, a closed one. One is or is not gay. Thus the label is and always will be an insider/outsider term regardless of its positive or negative associations. But, the old age community is not closed. We will all (it is hoped) eventually be an insider in this group. So perhaps in this case, use of the terms can, by both right and responsibility, be changed by anyone, not just those who are already insiders.

Perhaps there exists the possibility, by confronting our fears of our own immortality and by educating ourselves about the possibilities and potentials of old age, to change our views, not just of the terms but of the time of life they denote. It is hoped that works such as this, that provide examples of women in old age who are vital, creative, productive leaders, are a start in the right direction.

Lessons and Recommendations

A study of the women highlighted in this research reveals several lessons from which recommendations can be drawn. These lessons and recommendations, aimed for ourselves at any age, for those in old age, for those who work with the aged, and for those who create our social policies with respect to the aged, are summarized here.

Our current paradigms of old age negatively impact our society as a whole by setting up arbitrary limitations and expectations on those who are themselves in old age and by depriving us all of a source of potential leaders. In addition, and

to compound the problem, the coupling of our ageism as a society and the sexism that continues to be a part of American culture deprives us of a source of leaders who are versed and skilled in the type of servant and inclusive leadership that may well be necessary for our success in this day of globalization and participation. Rather than relegate women in old age to lives of continued or heightened invisibility, we can learn the lessons taught by the examples of the women in this study and others like them. They teach us not only to reach for new or continued leadership in old age ourselves, but also to tap into the well of potential leaders that are already in old age and but wait for our invitation and acceptance as leaders. We may indeed need to invite women in old age to participate and to be leaders. In doing so, we tap into their potential, strength, wisdom, creativity. It would appear that the growing mismatch between abilities and roles of old age referred to by Uhlenberg might well be countered by providing opportunities and resources to our aging population.

The strongest recommendation, then, comes in the form of a societal challenge to work toward solutions to the adaptive challenge of ageism. We begin by taking to heart the stories such as those of the women in this study and reframing our view of them not as women who are unique and different from us but as women who are like us and therefore are examples of how we can live our own lives in old age. They tell us much about what old age is and can be for women.

The women in this study tell us that old age is a time of choices. It is a time when our bodies sometimes cooperate in health and often do not but that,

regardless, we can make the choice to be of service in a variety of capacities.

We can lead through action; we can lead through the sharing of experience; we can lead through our words and ideas.

Beyond what they teach us about ourselves, they teach us the lesson that if we continue in our biases against those in old age, we deprive ourselves of a resource for leaders who are there for the asking. There are a bounteous number of social programs begging for resources including the people to help carry them out. As more and more people reaching old age and living longer, there is a vast group from which to draw and from whom could be culled new and creative solutions to the dilemmas that face us.

The life stories of the women in this study speak to the importance of lifelong education. It can be said that education afforded them opportunities to become leaders that might not have been open to them without. But, these women were also lifelong learners. John F. Kennedy said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." We must offer educational opportunities early and throughout life. As Louise wanted others to know, higher education does not have to be for 18-year-old college freshmen. And for the women in the study, learning never ended. It kept them fresh, enthusiastic, and amidst other people.

For most of the women in the study, becoming and staying leaders in old age was a direct result of their social and familial networks, either as the reason for beginning an activity that led to becoming leaders or as a support for challenges that might otherwise have curtailed such activities. Being around

others who were active was a catalyst for some of the women to get involved themselves. Sometimes this was directly causal (e.g. Ruby's foray into political activism). For others, either being invited to participate in activities that led to leadership or choosing those activities on their own (e.g. Quan Yin's decision to lead a fight for the processing of DNA rape kits) was aided by the social and familial networks of support present in their lives. The initial resistance of some of the women to their present endeavors (e.g. Ann and Mary Elizabeth's resistance to leadership positions) was eventually overcome by their taking support and encouragement *from* others and believing in the importance of accomplishing what they set out to do *for* others. And for Donna and Ann, decisions about which activities to pursue and how much of their time and energy they would be able to give to such activities came from support they received from their husbands' and families' willingness to do their part to bear the burdens of the women's time commitments. As was seen from their stories, these women called on the support of others before pursuing the endeavors in which they now find themselves. Old women without such support systems in place may not feel as free to attempt such pursuits.

These findings lead to two additional recommendations. First, it is important that women in old age establish and maintain social and emotional support systems. These networks of family and/or friends and colleagues serve us in two ways. At least for the women in the study, they served as a buffer and protection from damage from the stresses of life. Recent research (Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung, & Updegraff, 2000) has shown that, as opposed to

the fight or flight response with which men react to stress, women are aided by what has been labeled a tendency to “tend and befriend.” This includes tending to children and being with other women, which actually causes a release of the hormone oxytocin, a natural destressor.

In addition, support systems can, as with most of the women in the study, introduce women, invite women, or urge women into activities in which they can become active and leaders in old age or at any age. It is perhaps partly a result of isolation that those in old age in the past became increasingly inwardly gazing and contemplative rather than outwardly active and of continued service. In a vicious cycle, expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies of old age may have kept people isolated and away from the very networks and support systems that could have kept them vital.

Second, it is important to actively invite women in old age to participate. What they may not do for themselves, they may do for others. Again, with the growing numbers of Baby Boomers reaching old age, there will be large numbers of women to invite to be a part of the solution to many of our societal challenges and problems. The fact that many of the women in the study accepted invitations to participate and became leaders in order to help and support others gives incentive to creatively set up programs that take advantage of their desire to serve. Secrist (1996) noted that, “It can only be beneficial for the future of our society to have strong women speaking out in support of all others, male and female, all ages and ethnic backgrounds” (p. 208). This, combined with the importance of social networks, leads to a recommendation for the establishment

of programs that allow women in old age to work with underserved populations who themselves need a voice or an advocate. It is evident that, given resources and the emotional support to do so, women in old age can and do become leaders and live productive lives that are of benefit not only to themselves but to others.

“To study an issue through the lens of gender is to expose what more ‘natural’ analyses often fails to notice” (Holstein, 2002, p.39). There are recommendations for researchers interested in women’s adult development and women’s leadership to expand this study to include all ethnic, cultural socioeconomic, and other demographic groups. By doing so, we can better understand the nuances of their experiences and how other women different from those in the study thrive and become leaders in old age. And, while this study was limited to women, comparative studies of men in old age are also warranted for theory building.

In addition, the present study limited participation to those who were leaders in a new capacity since entering old age. Further research to compare experiences of women who have continued as leaders from endeavors prior to old age would shed light on any potential differences in leadership style, as well as other ways to keep leaders active in old age.

Final Reflections

In a sense, when I began this study, I thought it would have been discouraging to find that the leadership shown by the women in this study was merely a progression of leadership they had shown throughout their lives. I

wanted to find something exciting, sexy, new, raw, something like finding that these women had sat back all their lives and all of a sudden, in old age, burst through as leaders. Some new discovery about untapped potential. In fact, early on in the process of this research, a professor said, "Oh no, don't tell me that it's just that they were always leaders. How boring."

Yes, how boring and at once, how wonderful. Because the women in this study are not celebrities, did not come from extraordinary circumstances, did not have more advantages than the rest of us, were not sheltered from life's blows more than most of us. They are ordinary women who have, in their old age, done extraordinary things on the heels of a long life of courageous, though unsung, often unacknowledged and unrewarded leadership lived day to day, month to month, year to year.

I started out looking at these women as models of leadership and therefore role models for a "productive old age." I had judgments that their way was better but in interviewing them I find that what they offer is that old age is a time of choice and that "productive" is a social construct too. Perhaps they offer us an opportunity to peek into vital old age because we believe that theirs is a view worthy of observing but that, once inside, we can then see that they are vital and productive not because of the things they do that cause us to label them leaders but because of the women they are and have become that make them leaders in many aspects of life, not just those for which they are recognized as such.

They have, in old age, pursued and achieved status as societally recognized leaders in terms of a position or project after lifelong lessons in leadership that were most often unrecognized as such. Terri Monroe, Ph.D., professor of organizational leadership at the University of San Diego, has said, "The currency of leadership is courage." These women are rich in the currency of leadership and, in that sense, have been courageous leaders for many years. Showing others how to survive, thrive, learn and grow after profound loss makes them courageous leaders. Learning to adapt and bend and mold to ever-changing circumstances of life's joys and tragedies with dignity and integrity and joy of spirit is courageous. Standing up for others and teaching others to do for themselves makes them courageous leaders. Serving as role models and therefore helping others solve the adaptive challenges of aging in our society makes them courageous leaders as does helping others through death and fighting for what one believes in.

Through all these experiences, the women in this study maintained a sense of life and spirit, sought ever to grow, and pursued dreams and activities that would be of service to humanity, even against the odds, with few resources and often in ways that had not been tried before. This makes them courageous leaders. The fact that we find these women in activities that we, as a society, now deem to call leadership is an extra, added bonus. In fact, though, their lives have been lives of leadership.

Perhaps the biggest lesson for me personally as I finish writing this dissertation is not the importance of having a job, career, position, or activity in

order to call oneself a leader. Those will come and go and one's leadership will be put to use in them. More important is one's behavior, one's soul, one's outlook on life, one's integrity, one's attitude, all of which are brought to those jobs, careers, positions and activities: the invisible, the unseen.

This is not to say that I believe in the "trait theory" of leadership. Mere possession of a list of traits can be as pointless as having a library of books one does not read, or a shed full of tools one does not use to build with, or a box of paints and brushes one does not use to create with.

These are women who possess the traits we all have within us as potential, who have allowed themselves to be vulnerable to life, to love, to service. They took the lessons and models provided to them throughout their lives and used them, applied them to learn adaptability, flexibility, humor, creativity, and the art of not quitting. And like the blow-up clowns that keep getting knocked down but keep bouncing back up again, these women came back from the adversities dealt to them by life and kept going, kept laughing, kept serving others.

Emerson said, "No matter how many times you are defeated, you are born to victory." The women in this study show us all that we are born to victory. There is nothing different about them, their circumstances are not much different from any of ours. Their lives are not rosier, less trouble-filled. They have not been spared the adversities and obstacles life places in front of all of us. But – they have kept going. They used their hearts, their creativity, their souls, their

compassion, their love to rouse themselves to action and service. And for that we call them leaders.

And for their loving examples, I am blessed.

References

- Achenbaum, W. A. (1986). *Social Security: Visions and revisions*. New York: Grove Weidenfield.
- Ahern, K. D. (1996). *The older woman: The able self*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Akman, D. E., Toner, B. B., Stuckless, N., Ali, A., Emmott, S. D., & Downie, F. P. (2001). Feminist issues in research methodology: The development of a cognitive scale. *Feminism & Psychology* 11(2), 209-227.
- Amoss, P. & Harrell, S. (1981). An anthropological perspective on aging. In P. Amoss & S. Harrell, (Eds.), *Other ways of growing old* (pp. 3-4). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Atchley, R. C. (1993). Critical perspectives on retirement. In T. R. Cole & W. A. Achenbaum (Eds), *Voices and visions of aging: Toward a critical gerontology*. (pp. 3-19). New York: Springer Publishing Co.
- Baker, B. & Wheelwright, J. (1983). Analysis with the aged. In M. Stein (Ed.), *Jungian analysis*. La Salle, Ill: Open Court.
- Baltes, P. B. & Baltes, M. M. (1990). Psychological perspective on successful aging: The model of selective optimization with compensation. In P. B. Baltes & M. M. Baltes (Eds.), *Successful aging: Perspectives from the behavioral sciences* (pp. 1-34). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Baltes, P. B. & Smith, J. (1999). Multilevel and systemic analysis of old age: Theoretical and empirical evidence for a fourth age. In V. L. Bengtson, &

- K. W. Schaie, (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 153-174). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Bateson, M. C. (1989). *Composing a life*. New York: Atlantic Press.
- Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B. C., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. (1986). *Women's ways of knowing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bengston, V. L., Rice, C. J. & Johnson, M. L. (1999) Are theories of aging important? Models and explanations in Gerontology at the turn of the century. In V. L. Bengston & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 3-20). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Bengston, V. L & Schaie, K. W. (1999). *Handbook of theories of aging*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Bennis, W. G. & Thomas, R. J.(2002). *Geeks and Geezers: How era, values, and defining moments shape leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Berger, A. (1983). *Unlearning "learned helplessness" with the elderly through expressive interventions of poetry and song*. Unpublished dissertation. Boston University School of Education.
- Bieseke, M. & Howell, N. (1981). The old people give you life: Aging among the !Kung hunter gatherers. In P. Amoss & S. Harrell (Eds.), *Other ways of growing old: Anthropological perspectives* (pp. 77-98). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bridges, W. (1980). *Transitions: Making sense of life's changes*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

- Brim, G. (1992). *Ambition: How we manage success and failures throughout our lives*. New York: Basic Books.
- Britnall-Peterson, M. E. (1995). *How older adults use learning when becoming a new or first time leader*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison.
- Browne, C. V. (1998). *Women, feminism and aging*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Brozowski, K. (1998). *Educating women for the future: A cohort analysis of professional women and their attitudes toward retirement*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Burgess, E. W. (1960). Retirement as a social role. In R. C. Atchley. (Ed.), *The sociology of retirement* (pp. 60-73). New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Burns, J. M. (1979). *Leadership*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.
- Calasanti, T. M. (1993). Bringing in diversity: Toward an inclusive theory of retirement. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 7(2), pp. 133-150.
- Calasanti, T. M. (1996). Gender and life satisfaction in retirement: an assessment of the male model. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 51B, S18-S29.
- Campbell, R. & Schram, P. J. (1995). Feminist research methods: A content analysis of psychology and social science textbooks. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 19, 85-106.

- Carp, F. H. (1997). Retirement and women. In Coyle, J. M. (Ed.), *Handbook on women and aging* (pp. 112-128). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Carstensen, L. L. & Pasupathi, M. (1993). Women of a certain age. In Matteo, S. (Ed.), *American women in the nineties: Today's critical issues*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Catalyst (1998). *Advancing women in business – The Catalyst guide: Best practices from the corporate leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Chodorow, N. (1978). *The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cipres, E. L. (1999). *A case study of perceived characteristics and life events that enabled Latinas to become California community college presidents*. Unpublished dissertation. University of La Verne.
- Clarke, L. H. (2001). Older women's bodies and the self: The construction of identity in later life. *Canadian Review of sociology and anthropology* 38(4), pp.441-464.
- Clark, A. N. G. & Anderson, B. (1967). *Culture and aging*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.
- Coe, R. M. (1967). Professional perspectives on the aged. *The Gerontologist*, 7, 114-119.
- Cole, T. R., (1992) *The journey of life: A cultural history of aging in America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Conrad, C. (1992). Old age in the modern and postmodern western world. In Cole, T. R., Van Tassel, D. D. & Kastenbaum, R. (Eds.). *Handbook of the humanities and aging*. New York: Spring Publishing Company, Inc.
- Cowgill, D. O. & Holmes, I. D. (1972). *Aging and modernization*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Coyle, J. M. (1997). *Handbook on women and aging*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Coyle, J. M., Ed., (1997). *Handbook on women and aging*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Crawford, M. & Kimmel, E. (1999). Promoting methodological diversity in feminist research. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23, 1-6.
- Cristofalo, V. J., Tresini, M., Francis, M. K. & Volker, C. (1999). Biological theories of senescence. In V. L. Bengston & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 98-112). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Cross, S. P. & Madson, L. (1997). Models of self: Self-construals and gender. *Psychological Bulletin*, 122, 5-37.
- Cumming, E. and Henry, W. E. (1961). *Growing old: the process of disengagement*. New York: Basic Books.
- Davis, R. & Davis, J. A. (1985). *TV's image of the elderly: A practical guide for change*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretative interactionism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Dorfman, L. T. (1989). Retirement preparation and retirement satisfaction in the rural elderly. *The Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 8, 432-450.
- Dowd, J. J. & Bengston, V. L. (1978). *Aging in minority populations: An examination of the double jeopardy hypothesis*. *Journal of Gerontology*, 33, 427-436.
- Dyeson, T. B. (1998). *A structural equation model of the relationship between dependency, burden self-image, and depression among chronically-ill elders*.
Unpublished dissertation, University of Texas at Arlington.
- Erdner, R. A. & Guy, R. F. (1990). Career identification and women's attitudes toward retirement. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 30, 129-139.
- Erikson, E. H. (1963). *Childhood and society*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Erikson, E. H. (1997). *The life cycle completed (extended version)*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Erikson, E. H., Erickson, J. M., & Kivnick, H. (1986). *Vital involvement in old age: The experiences of old age in our time*. New York: Norton.
- Estes, C. L. (1979). *The aging enterprise*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Euler, B. (1992). A flaw in gerontological assessment: The weak relationship of elderly superficial life satisfaction to deep psychological well-being. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. 34(4), 299-310.
- Feinson, M. C. (1985). Where are the women in the history of aging? *Social Science History*, 9(4), 429-452.

- Finch, C. E. & Seeman, T. E. (1999). Stress theories of aging. In V. L. Bengtson & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 81-97). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Fischer, K. (1977). *Growing old in America (Expanded Edition)*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Flett, M. L. (1998). *Aging and values: A descriptive study of transpersonal values in individuals between the ages of 65 and 95*. Unpublished dissertation, Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, Palo Alto, CA.
- Fodor, I. G. & Franks, V. (1990). Women in midlife and beyond: The new prime of life? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 14, 445-449.
- Freedman, M. (2000). *Prime time: How baby boomers will revolutionize retirement and transform America*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Freidan, B. (1993). *The fountain of age*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Gallagher, C. & Golant, S. K. (2000). *Going to the top: A road map for success from America's leading executive women*. New York: Viking.
- Gardner, M. (1997). Women seek new models for later years. *Christian Science Monitor*, 89 (244), 10.
- Garner (1998) Editorial. *Aging & Mental Health*, 2(2), 92-93.
- George, L. K., Fillenbaum, G. G., & Palmore, E. (1984). Sex differences in the antecedents and consequences of retirement. *Journals of Gerontology*, 39, 364-371.
- Gerbner, G. (1993). *Women and minorities in television: A study in casting and fate*. A report to the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of

Radio and Television artists. The Annenberg School for Communication.
University of Pennsylvania.

- Gergen, M. M. (1990). Finished at forty: Women's development within the patriarchy. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 14, 471-493.
- Giarrusso, R, Mabry, J. B. & Bengston, V. L. (2001). The aging self in social contexts. In R. H. Binstock & L. K. George (Eds.), *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Gilligan, C. (1982) *In a different voice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Glass, T. A., Seeman, T. E., Herzog, A. R., Kahn, R., & Berkman, L. F. (1995). Change in productive activity in late adulthood: MacArthur studies of successful aging. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 50B, S65-S76.
- Glesne, C. (1999). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
- Goodson, I. F. (1998). Storying the self: Life politics and the study of the teacher's life and work. In W. F. Pinar, (Ed.), *Curriculum toward new identities*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Greenleaf, R. K. (1991). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Haber, C. (1997). Witches, widows, wives, and workers: The Historiography of elderly women in America. In J. M. Coyle (Ed.), *Handbook on women and aging* (pp. 29-40). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Hanson, K. & Wapner, S. (1994). Transition to retirement: Gender differences. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 39, 189-208.

- Harding, S. (1987). *Feminism and methodology: Social science issues*.
Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Harris, D. L. (1990). *Sociology of aging (2nd Ed.)*. New York: Harper & Row,
Publishers.
- Harris, L. & Associates, Inc. (1975). *The myths and reality of aging in America*.
Washington , D. C.: The National Council on Aging.
- Hartranft, L. B. (1992). *The ninth decade: Six central Ohio women*. Unpublished
dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Hatch, L. R. (1992). Gender differences in orientation towards retirement from
paid labor. *Gender and Society*, 6, 66-85.
- Havighurst, R., Neugarten, B. & Tobin, S. (1968). Disengagement and patterns of
aging. In B. Neugarten (Ed.), *Middle age and aging*. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press.
- Hazan, H. (1994). *Old age: Constructions and deconstructions*. Cambridge, MA:
Cambridge University Press.
- Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Cambridge, MA: The
Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Heifetz, R. A. & Laurie, D. L. (1997). *The work of leadership*. Harvard Business
Review.
- Heifetz, R. A. & Laurie, D. L. (1999). Mobilizing adaptive work. In J. Conger (Ed.),
The leader's change handbook. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Helgeson, S. (1990) *The female advantage: Women's ways of leading*. New
York: Doubleday.

- Hendricks, J. & Achenbaum, A. (1999). Historical development of theories of aging. In V. L. Bengston & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 21-39). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Herzog, A. R. & Markus, H. R. (1999). The self-concept in life span and aging research. In V. L. Bengston & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 227-252). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Holahan, C. (1985). The relationship between life goals at thirty and perceptions of goal attainment and life satisfaction at 70 for gifted men and women. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 20(1), 21-31.
- Holahan, C. (1994). Women's goal orientation across the life cycle: Findings from the Terman Study of the Gifted. In B. F. Turner & L. E. Troll (Eds.), *Women growing older: Psychological perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Holstein, M. B. (2001/2002). A feminist perspective on anti-aging medicine. *Generations* 25(4), 38-43.
- Hurd, L. C. (1995). We're not old!: Older women's negotiation of aging and oldness. *Journal of aging studies* 13(4), 419-439.
- Ivanko, K. (1990). *Separation and its psychological effects on the elderly*. Unpublished dissertation. New York: The Union Institute.
- Jacobs, J., Gubrium, J., & Hochschild, A. R. (1975). The phenomenological theory. In D. L. Decker (Ed.), *Social gerontology*. Boston: Little Brown and Co.

- Jordan, J. V., Kaplan, A. G., Miller, J. B., Stiver, I. P., & Surrey, J. L. (1991). *Women's growth in connection: Writings from the Stone Center*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Joyappa, V. & Self, L. S. (1996). Feminist research methodologies as collective self-education and political praxis. *Convergence* 29(3), 16-23.
- Jung, C. G. (1923). *Psychological types*. In
- Kaufman, S. R. (1993). Values as sources of the ageless self. In J. R. Kelly (Ed.). *Activity and aging* (pp. 17-24). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Keddy, B. A. & Singleton, J. F. (1991). Women's perceptions of life after retirement. *Activities, Adaptations & Aging*, 16, 57-65.
- Keith, P. M. (1982). Working women versus homemakers. Retirement resources and correlates of well-being. In M. Szinovacs (Ed.), *Women's retirement: Policy implications of recent research* (pp. 77-91). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Keith, J. (1985) In C. K. Sigelman & D. R. Shaffer (Eds.), *Life-span human development*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole publishing Company.
- Kendig, H. L. (1986). *Aging and Families: A support network perspective*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Kerschner, H. & Pegues, J. A. M. (1998). Productive aging: A quality of life agenda. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 98(12), pp. 14-45.
- Kim, J. E. & Moen, P. (2001). Is retirement good or bad for subjective well-being? *Current directions in psychological science*, 10(3), 83-86.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

- Lawrence-Lightfoot, S. & Davis, J. H. (1997). *The art and science of portraiture*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lerum, K. (2001). Subjects of desire: Academic armor, intimate ethnography, and the production of critical knowledge. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7(4), 466-483.
- Levin, J. & Levin, W. (1980). *Ageism: Prejudice and discrimination against the elderly*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Levinson, D. (1978). *The seasons of a man's life*. New York: Knopf.
- Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lippert, L. (1997). Women at midlife: Implications for theories of women's development. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 76(1), 16-22.
- Lowenthal, M. F., Thurnher, M., & Chiriboga, D. (1975). *Four stages of life: A comparative study of women and men facing transition*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- MacDonald, B. & Rich C. (1991). *Look me in the eye: Old women, aging and ageism*. San Francisco: Spinsters, Ink.
- Maddox, G. L. (1968). Persistence of life style among the elderly: A longitudinal study of patterns of social activity in relation to life satisfaction. In B. Neugarten (Ed.), *Middle age and aging – a reader in social psychology*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Madey, S. F. (2000). Toward a social psychology of aging. *Basic & Applied Psychology*, 22(3), 133-135.

- Maiden, R. J. (1980). *The attribution of learned helplessness and depression in the elderly*. Unpublished dissertation. New School for Social Research.
- Manheimer, R. J. (1995). *The second middle age: Looking differently at life beyond fifty*. Detroit: Visible Ink Press.
- Markides, K. (1995). Minorities and aging, In G. Maddox (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of aging*. New York: Springer.
- Markson., E. W. (1997) Sagacious, sinful, or superfluous? The special construction of older women. In J. M. Coyle (Ed), *Handbook on Women and Aging* (pp. 53-71). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Marshall, V. W (1999). Analyzing social theories of aging. In V. L. Bengston & K. W. Schaie (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of aging* (pp. 434-459). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Matthews, A. M. & Brown, K. H. (1988). Retirement as a critical life event. *Research on Aging*, 9, 548-571.
- McCallum, K. A. (1996). *Attachments styles in late adulthood: Internal working model of friendships among elderly residents in a domiciliary*. Unpublished dissertation. Pacific Graduate School of Psychology.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Midanik, L. T., Soghikian, K., Ransom, L. J. & Tekawa, I. S. (1995). The effect of retirement on mental health and health behaviors: The Kaiser Permanente Retirement Study. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, 50B, 559-561.
- Miller, J. B. (1986). *Toward a new psychology of women*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Montague, A. (1977). Don't be adultish! *Psychology Today*, 11, 46.
- Morrison, A.M., White, R.P, Van Velsor, E. & The Center for Creative Leadership (1987). *Breaking the glass ceiling: Can women reach the top of America's largest corporations?* New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc.
- Muskopf, B. A. (1998). *Women, education, and leadership: A narrative of four women*. Unpublished dissertation. Miami University.
- Neugarten , B. (1968). *Middle age and aging – a reader in social psychology*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Neugarten , B. (1980). Acting one's age: New rules for old. In H. P. Chudacoff (Ed.), *How old are you? Age consciousness in American culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Noddings, N. (1984). *Caring*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Oleson, V. (2000). Feminisms and qualitative research at and into the millennium. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd Ed)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Onyx, J. & Benton, P. (1996). Retirement: a problematic concept for older women. *Journal of Women and Aging*, 8, 19-34.
- O'Rand, A.M. & Krecker, M. L. (1990). Concepts of the life cycle. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16, 241-262.
- O'Reilly, E. M. (1997). *Decoding the cultural stereotypes about aging*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.

- Palmore, E. B. (1999). *Ageism: Negative and positive*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.)*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Perkins, K. (1992). Psychosocial implications of women and retirement. *Social Work*, 37(6), 256-262.
- Perron, D. (1990). *Sparkle, spunk and spirit: Exploring the lives of the oldest-old (Successful aging, aging, vitality)*. Unpublished dissertation. New York: The Union Institute.
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis. *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5-23.
- Prentis, R. S., (1980). White-collar working women's perceptions of retirement. *The Gerontologist*, 20, 90-95.
- Price, C. A. (1998). *Women and retirement: The unexplored transition*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Quadagno, J. & Reid, J. (1999). In V. L. Bengtson & K. W. Schaie (Eds), *Handbook of theories of aging*, (pp. 344-358). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.
- Raghuram, P. & Madge, C. (1998). Feminist research methodologies in student projects in geography. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 22(1), 35-48.
- Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist methods in social research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Riley, M. W., Johnson, M., & Foner, A. (1972). *Aging and society*. Vol. 3, *A sociology of age stratification*. New York: Russell Sage.
- Roubanis, J. L. (2000). *Academic pioneers: An investigation of the pathways women have taken to the presidency of higher education institutions in the Raleigh-Durham metropolitan region of North Carolina*. Unpublished dissertation. North Carolina State University.
- Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Ruggles, S. (1994). The transformation of American family structure. *American Historical Review*, 99 (1).
- Scherr, M. (2000). *Learning and living across the decades*. Address to the University of the Third Age, January 9, 2000.
- Secombe, K. & Lee, G. R. (1986). Gender differences in retirement satisfaction and its antecedents. *Research on Aging*, 8, 426-440.
- Secrist, J. (1996). *Voices of midlife tomboys: A narrative study*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of San Diego.
- Sheehy, G. (1976) *Passages: Predictable crises of adult life*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Sheehy, G. (1995) *New passages: Mapping your life across time*. New York: Random House.
- Sherman S. (1997) Images of middle-aged and older women: Historical, cultural, and personal. In J. M. Coyle (Ed.), *Handbook on women and aging* (pp.14-28). Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.

- Sigelman, C. K. & Shaffer, D. R. (1995). *Life-span human development*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
- Small, L. M. (2000). Material memories ethnography: Women's purposeful use of popular culture anachronisms in Quasi-Communal retirement. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 29(5), 563-592.
- Smith, J. & Baltes, M. M. (1998). The role of gender in very old age: Profiles of functioning and everyday life patterns. *Psychology & Aging*, 13(4), 676-695.
- Snyder, S. L. (1998). *Work-life integration and the processes of university women's retirement, toward the development of a grounded theory*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.
- Spears, L., & DePree, M. (1995). *Reflections on leadership: How Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership influenced today's top management thinkers*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Spears, L., Lawrence, M & Blanchard, K. (2001). *Focus on leadership: Servant-leadership for the 21st century*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic interview*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.
- Stavenuiter, M. & Bijsterveld, K. (2000, April). Introduction: Long lives, silent witnesses – elderly women in the past. *Journal of Family History*, 25(2), 196-201).
- Sternberg, R. J. (1996). *Successful intelligence: How practical and creative intelligence determine success in life*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

- Storer, S. R. (1998). *The influence of retirement on the self-concept: A gender comparison*. Unpublished dissertation, California State University, Long Beach.
- Sykes, D. J. (1998). *Family involvement in early childhood interagency collaborative efforts: Nine case studies*. Unpublished dissertation, Ohio State University, Columbus.
- Szinovacz, M. (1983). Beyond the hearth: Older women and retirement. In E. W. Markson, (Ed.), *Older women: Issues and prospects*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Taylor, S. E., Klein, L.C., Lewis, B. P., Gruenewald, T. L., Gurung, R.A.R., & Updegraff, J. A. (2000). "Female Responses to Stress: Tend and Befriend, Not Fight or Flight", *Psychological Review*, 107(3), 41-429.
- Tharenou, P., Latimer, S. & Conroy, D. (1994). How do you make it to the top? An examination of influences on women's and men's managerial advancement. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 37(4), 899-931.
- Thompson P., Itzin, C. & Abendstern, M. (1990). *I don't feel old: The experience of later life*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Treleaven, L. D. C. (1999). *Midline professional women envisage retirement: Aspirations, attitudes and concerns*. Unpublished dissertation, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
- Turner, B. F. & Troll, L. E. (1994). *Women growing older: Psychological perspectives*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Uhlenberg, P. (1992). Population aging and social policy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 18, 449-47.
- United States Bureau of the Census (1995). Census projections of older Americans. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, Sept/Oct Part 2 of 2, 89(5), 12-13.
- Van Zandt, P. L. (1991). *The invisible woman: Women over age 65 in today's society*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Veeder, N. (1992). *Women's decision making: Common themes...Irish voices*. Westport, CT: Preager Publishers.
- Veltrop, M. R. (1999). *Business leaders in transition: An organic inquiry into eight transformational journeys*. Unpublished dissertation. Institute for Transpersonal Psychology.
- Walker, A. (1982). Dependency and old age. *Social Policy and Administration*, 16(2), 135-155.
- Warburton, J. & Rosenman, L. (1995). The meaning of retirement – why retirement gets a bad press. *Social Alternatives*, 14(2), 11-14.
- Wastell, C. A. (1996). Feminist developmental theory: Implications for counseling. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 74(6), 575-581.
- Wellington, S. (1998) Cracking the ceiling. *Time*, 152(23), 187.
- Whitbourne, S. K. (1999) Physical changes. In J. C. Cavanaugh & S. K. Whitbourne (Eds.), *Gerontology: An interdisciplinary perspective*, (pp. 91-122).

- Whitbourne, S. K. (2001). *Adult development and aging: Biopsychosocial perspectives*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Wilkinson, S. (1988). The role of reflexivity in feminist psychology. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 11, 493-502.
- Woolf, L. M. (2002). *Gender and ageism*. Retrieved August 13, 2002 from <http://www.webster.edu/~woolfilm/ageismgender.html>.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

1. I have heard an explanation of the purpose and procedures of this research and I am aware that the purpose of this exercise is to conduct an audiotape-recorded biographical interview.
2. I understand that I may be asked to participate in one to two follow-up interviews.
3. I understand that there are no anticipated risks of my participation in the interview(s) beyond a possible mild fatigue.
4. I understand that I may or may not benefit from my participation in the study. The benefit may be the knowledge that I have added to a body of knowledge about this topic.
5. I understand that my participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that if I withdraw, data collected prior to withdrawal will not be used.
6. I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review transcript(s) of my interview(s) and summaries of interviews prepared by the researcher.
7. I have been informed that the interview(s) will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour each.
8. I understand that my identity will be kept confidential through the use of a pseudonym.
9. I understand that there is no agreement, written or verbal, beyond that expressed in this consent form.

I, the undersigned, understand the above explanations and, on that basis, I give consent to my voluntary participation in this research.

Signature of Subject or Parent/Guardian

Date

Location

Signature of Principle Researcher

Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

1. Please tell me a story about how any role models you have had have affected your life.
2. What obstacles have you had to overcome to participate in your present endeavor?
3. What kinds of things encourage you?
4. a) How would you describe yourself? b) If I had asked you the same question 30 years ago, how would the answer have been different? c) If I had asked you the same question 50 years ago, how would the answer have been different?
5. a) Please tell me a story about your present endeavor that would tell me how you feel about it. b) Do you think you would feel differently if this had occurred much earlier in your life?
6. What do you look forward to?
7. What would you say to other women your age who feel they want to accomplish something but have people around them telling them to slow down, take it easy or just relax?
8. What prepared you for what you are doing?
9. Tell me about the people who encouraged/ supported you in your present endeavor?
10. Tell me about the people who discouraged you.
11. Do you feel as though your present endeavor is a continuation in some way of what you've done before or is it something entirely new and different for you?